

Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic disease related to a metabolism disorder. In a healthy body, digested food is broken down into glucose, the form of sugar in the blood that's a main source of fuel for the body. For glucose to be used as energy in the cells, insulin, produced by the pancreas, must be present. In people with diabetes, the pancreas either produces little or no insulin, or the cells do not react correctly to the insulin that is produced. Consequently, high levels of sugar build up in the blood causing serious health complications.

To determine whether a patient has diabetes, healthcare providers conduct a fasting plasma glucose test (FPG) or an oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT). With the tests, a fasting blood glucose level between 100 and 125 mg/dl signals pre-diabetes. A person with a fasting blood glucose level of 126 mg/dl or higher has diabetes.

People at Risk

The cause of diabetes continues to be unknown; however, both genetics and environmental factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play a role. Diabetes is common in the African-American community; about 11 percent have the disease.

Health Risks with Diabetes

Diabetes can result in serious health complications including:

- High blood pressure and cholesterol
- Heart disease and stroke (Heart disease is the leading cause of death in people with diabetes.)
- Eye problems (People with diabetes are at risk for glaucoma, cataracts, and becoming blind.)
- Infections (Diabetes may cause your body to become weak and unable to fight off infections.)
- Kidney damage
- Nerve damage
- Problems with pregnancy (Diabetes can lead to birth defects and miscarriages.)



Managing Diabetes

Managing diabetes means making changes to your lifestyle. Regularly testing your blood sugar will help you stay aware and under control of the disease. Diet and physical activity are also key elements in managing your blood sugar, but you may need to take medicine as well. Keeping your glucose level under control will lower your risk of the serious complications listed above.

Treatment for Diabetes

Talk to your doctor about managing your diabetes. He may prescribe one or more medicines to help control your blood sugar, along with a balanced diet and physical activity.

It's important to monitor your blood sugar. Check blood sugar levels frequently, especially before meals and at bedtime. Keeping a log of these levels will help you and your doctor monitor your progress.

Do not smoke. Smoking cigarettes increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and other complications of the disease.

Drink moderately or eliminate drinking. Alcohol abuse can also increase diabetes complications.

For More Information

Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about managing your diabetes. With increased education and awareness, it's easier to control and manage your diabetes.

You can find more information about diabetes at www.empoweredtoserve.org.