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Healthy Insights

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Are you at risk for developing diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic, or ongoing, disease that affects how your body turns food into energy. But do you know how and why you might be at risk for developing diabetes?

What is diabetes?

Most of the food we eat is broken down into sugar (or glucose) that is released into our bloodstream. This causes our blood sugar to go up. For people who don't have diabetes, this increase in blood sugar signals the pancreas to release insulin, which allows the blood sugar to enter the body's cells to be used as energy.

People with diabetes either don't produce enough insulin or their bodies can't use the insulin they make. This causes too much blood sugar in the bloodstream. Without treatment, this can lead to serious health problems, like heart disease, kidney disease, and vision loss.



Types of diabetes and what can put you at risk

Type 1 diabetes is believed to be caused by an "autoimmune reaction" in which the body attacks itself by mistake and destroys the cells in the pancreas that make insulin.

Known risk factors for type 1 diabetes

- Having a parent, brother or sister with type 1 diabetes
- Caucasians are at higher risk for developing type 1 diabetes than African Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans.
- Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age, but is more likely to develop in children, teens or young adults.

Prevention

Diet and lifestyle habits don't have an effect on whether someone may or may not develop type 1 diabetes. There is no known way to prevent type 1 diabetes.

Prediabetes is a condition that causes blood sugar levels to be higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes.

Prediabetes is your chance to prevent or delay type 2 diabetes. There are no clear symptoms of prediabetes, so it's possible to have it without knowing that you do. However, most people who develop type 2 diabetes had prediabetes.

Known risk factors for prediabetes

- Excess weight
- Age 45 years or older
- Having a parent, brother or sister with type 2 diabetes
- Not exercising enough (less than 30 minutes three times per week)
- Being African American, Hispanic/Latino American, American Indian, or Alaska Native (some Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans are also at higher risk)
- For women, a history of gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy) or having given birth to a baby who weighed more than nine pounds

Prevention

You can prevent or reverse prediabetes with simple lifestyle changes such as losing weight if you're overweight, eating healthier, and getting regular physical activity.

Type 2 diabetes develops when someone's cells don't respond to insulin the way they should. When that happens, the pancreas can't keep up with the amount of insulin that is needed, causing the blood sugar to rise. This sets the stage for prediabetes and type 2 diabetes.

Known risk factors for type 2 diabetes

- The same risk factors as listed for prediabetes
- Prediabetes
- A diagnosis of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease

Prevention

Like prediabetes, type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed when simple lifestyle changes are adopted. These include losing weight for people who are overweight, healthy eating, and regular physical activity.

Sources:

American Diabetes Association: <https://diabetes.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://cdc.gov/diabetes/basics>



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IPRO Healthy Insights is authored by Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, and a nationally recognized public health advocate.

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