

# Diabetes

## An Introduction



### What are the signs and symptoms of diabetes?\*

- Unusual thirst
- Frequent urination
- Weight change (either gain or loss)
- Extreme fatigue or lack of energy
- Blurred vision
- Frequent or recurring infections
- Cuts and bruises that are slow to heal
- Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet
- Trouble getting or maintaining an erection

\*Keep in mind that many people with type 2 diabetes display none of these symptoms. Talk to your family health care provider about whether you are at risk.

### Is diabetes preventable?

Scientists believe that changing your lifestyle can help prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes. Healthy eating, weight control and physical activity are important prevention steps.

You are not alone. In Ontario, there are over 1,300,000 people living with diabetes.

### What is diabetes?

There are three main types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed during the childhood and teen years and occurs when the pancreas is unable to produce insulin. Insulin is a hormone that controls the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood. Your body produces glucose from the food you eat to give your body energy, but needs insulin to use it. Approximately 10 per cent of people with diabetes have type 1 diabetes. The cause of type 1 diabetes remains unknown; however, we do know it is not preventable, and it is not caused by eating too much sugar. Anyone with type 1 diabetes must take insulin.

The remaining 90 per cent have type 2 diabetes, which occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body does not effectively use the insulin that is produced. Type 2 diabetes usually develops in adulthood, although increasing numbers of children in high-risk populations are being diagnosed. People with type 2 diabetes may manage their condition with lifestyle changes like healthy eating and being physically active. They may also take diabetes medications or insulin. For more information about managing type 2 diabetes, refer to the “Staying Healthy – Managing Type 2 Diabetes” fact sheet in this kit.

A third type of diabetes, gestational diabetes, is a temporary condition that occurs during pregnancy. It affects approximately two to four per cent of all pregnancies (in the non-Aboriginal population) and involves an increased risk of developing diabetes for both mother and child.

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## Is diabetes serious?

If not treated or properly managed, diabetes can result in a variety of complications, including:

- Heart disease and stroke
- Kidney disease
- Eye disease
- Erectile dysfunction (impotence)
- Nerve damage

Good diabetes management can help to prevent or delay these complications – talk to your health care provider.



## What are the risk factors for diabetes?

If you are 40 years of age or over, you are at risk for type 2 diabetes and should be tested at least every three years. You should be tested annually if you:

- Are a member of one of the following high-risk groups: Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian or African descent
- Are overweight – especially if you carry most of your weight around your middle
- Have a parent, brother or sister with diabetes
- Have any health complications associated with diabetes, such as eye, nerve or kidney problems
- Gave birth to a baby weighing more than 4 kg (9 lbs)
- Had gestational diabetes while you were pregnant
- Have a history of impaired glucose tolerance, impaired fasting glucose or prediabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have high cholesterol or other high levels of fats in the blood
- Have been diagnosed with any of the following conditions:
  - Polycystic ovary syndrome
  - Acanthosis nigricans (darkened patches of skin)
  - Psychiatric disorders: schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder
  - Obstructive sleep apnea
  - Use of glucocorticoid medication

This document reflects our  
**CPG**  
Clinical Practice Guidelines

Content taken from the Canadian  
Diabetes Association's consumer  
fact sheet, *Diabetes*.