

Straight Talk about **Diabetes**

How to live with diabetes
and still live your life



Arkansas Foundation
for Medical Care

Table of Contents

- I. Living with Diabetes:**
 - Your Guide to Better Living3**
 - What is diabetes?4
 - Who gets type 2 diabetes?4
 - What are the signs of diabetes?5
 - How do I know for sure I have diabetes?5
 - Take charge of your diabetes!6-7
 - People with diabetes should also7
- II. Protect Your Sight8**
- III. Take Care of Your Heart.....9**
 - What is a lipid profile?9
- IV. On Your Feet.....10**
 - Foot care tips10
- V. Pathways to Good Health11**

Living with Diabetes:

Your Guide to Better Living

About 15.7 million people in the United States have diabetes, and nearly one-third of them don't even know they have it. Without the right care, these people could develop kidney disease, or suffer from a heart attack or stroke. They might also lose their sight and become blind, or develop foot infections that could lead to amputation.

But it doesn't have to be that way. With the right health care and lifestyle, people with diabetes can be healthy and enjoy life.



What is diabetes?

If you have diabetes, your body does not make insulin or use it the right way. Insulin is important because it helps change sugar, starches and other foods into energy. When sugar can't get into the cells, it builds up in the blood and overflows into the urine.

There are two major types of diabetes. Both can cause serious medical problems:

- In **type 1 diabetes**, the body makes no insulin at all. Type 1 affects 500,000 to 750,000 Americans. People with type 1 diabetes have to take insulin all their lives, and they have to get plenty of exercise and eat the right foods.
- In **type 2 diabetes**, the body can't make enough insulin or use it the right way. Type 2 used to be called "adult-onset" diabetes, but today, more and more young people are getting it. More than 90 percent of all diabetes cases are type 2. Some people with type 2 diabetes are treated with insulin or other medicines. But many can control their blood sugar just by eating the right foods and getting plenty of exercise.

Who gets type II diabetes?

Your chances of getting type 2 diabetes go up as you get older. Anyone can get type 2 diabetes, but it is more common in African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans.

You are also at higher risk if:

- You are overweight.
- You do not get enough exercise.
- Someone in your family has diabetes.
- You are a woman who had diabetes while you were pregnant.
- You are a woman and had a baby that weighed more than nine pounds at birth.



What are the signs of diabetes?

One reason so many people don't know they have diabetes is that different people have different symptoms. You might have diabetes if:

- You are very thirsty and have a dry mouth.
- You have to urinate often.
- You are very tired and don't have much energy.
- You suddenly lose weight and you don't know why.
- Your cuts heal very slowly.
- You often have infections.
- Your vision is blurred.

If you have symptoms of diabetes, see your doctor promptly.

How do I know for sure that I have diabetes?

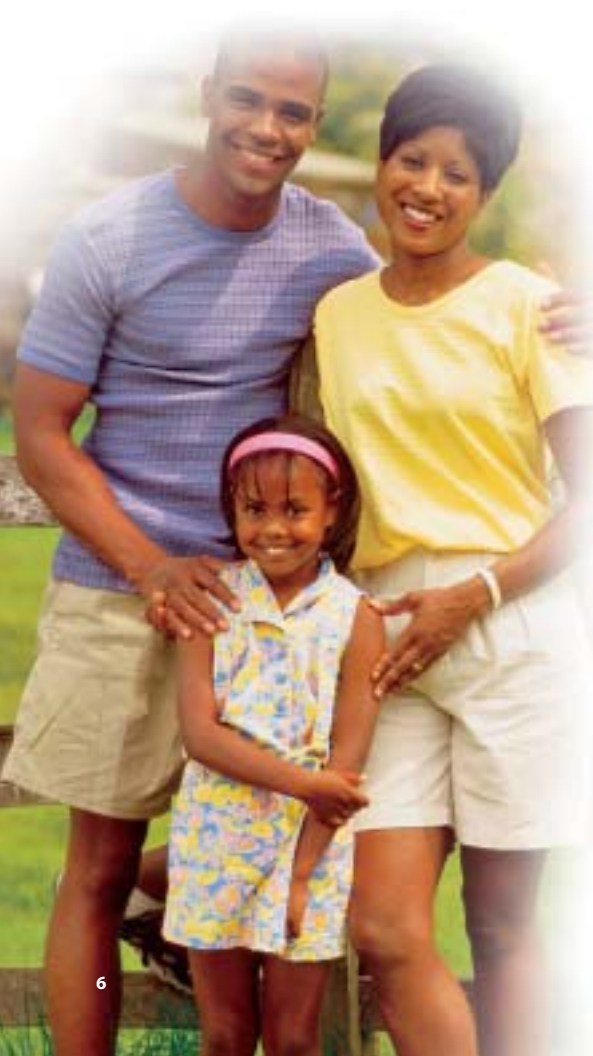
Your doctor can figure out if you have diabetes. He or she will give you a test that measures how much sugar is in your blood. This type of test is usually done on an empty stomach before breakfast, or after a meal. If your doctor is still not sure whether you have diabetes, he or she may want to watch your blood sugar over a period of time.



Take charge of your diabetes!

If you have diabetes, you need to take special care of yourself to stay healthy. The right care can help prevent problems like kidney disease or blindness. The American Diabetes Association recommends that you:

- Visit your doctor two to four times each year. He or she can check your health and see if your diabetes is under control. Your doctor will also order and look over lab tests, check your feet, and check your blood pressure.
- Keep your blood sugar in control by eating right, getting plenty of exercise and taking your insulin or other medicine. Talk to your doctor or diabetes educator about what you should eat, when you should eat and how much.
- Check your blood sugar at home as often as your doctor tells you to. You'll need a tool called a glucose monitor for this. If you're on Medicare or Medicaid, you can get help paying for the monitor.
- Get a hemoglobin A1c test (a special kind of blood sugar test) at least two times per year. This test measures how well your blood sugar has been controlled for the past six to eight weeks. This is important, because keeping your blood sugar under control can help prevent serious health problems later.



- Get a fasting lipid (cholesterol) test every year. Aim for LDL (“bad” cholesterol) of 100 or lower.
- Bring high blood pressure down to 130/80 or lower. Have your doctor check it at every visit.
- Get a dilated eye exam (a special kind of eye test) once a year by a professional eye doctor.
- Get a flu shot every year.
- Get a yearly urine protein test to see how your kidneys are working.

People with diabetes should also:

- **Quit smoking or using any kind of tobacco!** If you have diabetes and smoke, you are five times more likely to get heart disease than a nonsmoker with diabetes. Chewing tobacco, dip and snuff are also bad for your heart, and they contain sugar.
- Check your feet every day for cuts, blisters or sores. Also have them checked by your doctor at each visit.
- Learn about diabetes. You might want to join a support group. Your doctor can help you find one.

There is no cure for diabetes. But if you find out early that you have diabetes, you can get the right kind of treatment and learn how to control it. That way, you can help yourself stay healthy so you can enjoy life.

For more information about diabetes, contact the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-DIABETES or www.diabetes.org.



Protect Your Sight

People with diabetes are at a high risk for eye problems and can even go blind. If you have diabetes, you should get a special eye test called a **dilated eye exam** each year from an eye doctor. You might need these eye exams more often if you already have diabetic eye disease.

Finding out early that you have diabetic eye disease can help you stop serious damage before it happens. But, many people with diabetes do not get their eyes checked often enough. They wait until damage has already been done.

There are no obvious signs of diabetic eye disease at first—no pain, no blurred vision, and no redness. That's why it's important to get a dilated eye exam each year.

Laser surgery, a special kind of surgery that uses strong beams of light, can help treat diabetic eye disease if it's caught early. Even in severe cases, laser surgery can slow down vision loss.

People with diabetes are also at higher risk for cataracts or glaucoma, which can also cause vision problems. Remember to have your eyes checked by an eye doctor each year, and ask for a dilated eye exam. The best way to take care of your eyes is to keep your blood sugar in control and get a dilated eye exam each year.



Take Care of Your Heart

If you have diabetes, your chances of getting heart disease are up to four times higher than a nondiabetic's chances. If you're older, a smoker or have high cholesterol, you are even more likely to have a heart attack, stroke or other serious problems with your heart.

If you have diabetes, you need to get a cholesterol test called a "lipid profile" each year. With this test, your doctor can figure out your risk for heart disease and decide on treatment, if needed. If you're on Medicare or Medicaid, this test is covered.

What is a lipid profile?

A lipid profile is an in-depth cholesterol test. It is more complete than one you might get at your pharmacy or at a health fair. Before the test, you should not eat for 12 hours and you should not drink alcohol for 24 hours. You can drink water. To get the best results, schedule the test for sometime in the morning.

Your doctor will talk to you about the results of your lipid profile. The most important number is the LDL, sometimes called "bad cholesterol." Your LDL number should be about 100. If it gets higher than 130, you need to talk to your doctor about how to lower it. You might need to eat different foods or take medicine.

Getting your lipid profile every year is one thing you can do to keep your heart and blood vessels healthy. Also, eat lean meat like chicken or fish, fresh vegetables and healthy grains like whole wheat bread or oatmeal. Avoid fried foods and other high-fat treats. Talk to your doctor or diabetes educator about what to eat, when to eat and how much to eat. Get plenty of exercise, and don't smoke! If your lipid levels are still too high, your doctor may prescribe medicine.

On Your Feet

If you have diabetes, you need to take special care of your feet. Diabetes can cause you to lose feeling in your feet. You might not notice cuts, blisters or other sores, so you won't get them treated. Without treatment, they could get worse.

Also, people with diabetes might have poor blood circulation in their feet, so cuts don't heal as well. This can cause serious foot infections, and could lead to amputation.

People with diabetes should inspect their feet everyday. If you can't check your feet yourself, ask someone to do it for you. Tell your doctor about any problems as soon as you can, so you can get treated.

Foot Care Tips:

- If you smoke cigarettes, STOP! Smoking causes your blood vessels to get smaller. That will keep blood from circulating in your feet.
- Check your feet every day. Look for scratches, cracks, cuts, blisters or any change that might be a problem. If you find something, tell your doctor.
- Wear clean socks every day.
- Never go barefoot, even in your home.

Pathways to Good Health

Flu and pneumonia can be very dangerous for people with diabetes. If you have diabetes, get a flu shot each year, and a one-time pneumonia shot. If you're on Medicare or Medicaid, the shots are covered.



If you have Medicare or Medicaid,
most of your care and supplies
for diabetes are covered.

For questions about what **Medicare** will pay,
call **1-800-MEDICARE**
or call AFMC at **1-800-272-5528**.

For questions about what **Medicaid** will pay,
call **1-800-482-5431**.



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