



## Diabetes 101

There are 20.8 million people in the United States who have diabetes, yet 6.2 million are unaware that they have the disease.

### ***What is Diabetes?***

Diabetes is a disease in which blood glucose levels are above normal. People with diabetes have problems converting food to energy. After a meal, food is broken down into a sugar called glucose, which is carried by the blood to cells throughout the body. Cells use the hormone insulin, made in the pancreas, to help them process blood glucose into energy.

Type 1 diabetes, formerly called juvenile diabetes or insulin-dependent diabetes, is usually first diagnosed in children, teenagers, or young adults. Type 2 diabetes, formerly called adult-onset diabetes or noninsulin-dependent diabetes, is the most common form of diabetes. People can develop type 2 diabetes at any age—even during childhood. Some women develop gestational diabetes during the late stages of pregnancy.

People develop type 2 diabetes because the cells in the muscles, liver, and fat do not use insulin properly. Eventually, the pancreas cannot make enough insulin for the body's needs. As a result, the amount of glucose in the blood increases while the cells are starved of energy. Over the years, high blood glucose damages nerves and blood vessels, leading to complications such as heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney disease, nerve problems, gum infections, and amputation.

### ***What are the Risk Factors for Diabetes?***

You are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes if you have a parent or sibling with diabetes, over the age of 45, have had gestational diabetes, have high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels, are not physically active, are overweight/obese, or are of African American, American Indian, Asian American, Pacific Islander or Hispanic descent.

Approximately 3.2 million or 13.3 percent of all African Americans aged 20 years or older have diabetes; 2.5 million or 9.5 percent of all Latino Americans aged 20 years or older have diabetes; 118,000 Native Americans and Alaska Natives, or 15.1 percent of the population, receiving care from Indian Health Services (IHS) have diabetes, and Native Hawaiians, Japanese and Filipino residents of Hawaii aged 20 years or older are approximately two times as likely to have diagnosed diabetes as white residents of Hawaii of similar age.

### ***General Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes***

The signs of diabetes may include being very thirsty; urinating often; feeling very hungry or tired; losing weight without trying; having sores that heal slowly; having dry, itchy skin; losing the feeling in your feet or having tingling in your feet and having blurry eyesight. You may have one or more of these signs before you find out you have diabetes, or you may have no signs at all.

### ***Screening***

A blood test to check your glucose levels will show if you have pre-diabetes or diabetes.

### ***How is Diabetes Treated?***

Healthy eating, exercise, and losing weight may help you lower your blood glucose (also called blood sugar) when you find out you have type 2 diabetes. If these treatments do not work, you may need one or more types of diabetes medications to lower your blood glucose. After a few more years, you may need to take insulin shots because your body is not making enough insulin.

<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/>