

## What is diabetes?

Diabetes occurs when a person's body doesn't make enough insulin or doesn't use insulin the right way. Insulin helps your cells use blood sugar for energy. Diabetes causes the sugar to build up in your blood.

Diabetes can generally be classified as type 1 or type 2. If you have type 1, your body makes little or no insulin. If you have type 2, your body makes some insulin but can't use it properly. Most adults with diabetes have type 2.

## What health problems can diabetes cause?

Over time, high blood sugar levels can damage your eyes, blood vessels, nerves and kidneys. Damage to your nerves can lead to foot sores, problems with digestion and impotence. Damage to your blood vessels increases your risk of heart attack and stroke. Many of these problems can be delayed or prevented with treatment.

## How is diabetes treated?

The goal in treating diabetes is to keep the level of sugar in your blood as close to normal as possible--not too high (called hyperglycemia) or too low (called hypoglycemia). You can do this by eating right, by exercising and by taking insulin or medicine if your doctor prescribes it.

Regularly checking your blood sugar is a key to helping you control it. Blood sugar checks can help you see how food, exercise and insulin or medicine affects your level. Checking your blood sugar also allows you and your doctor to change your treatment plan if needed.

### Call your doctor if:

- You start feeling very thirsty and are urinating more.
- You feel sick to your stomach or vomit more than once.
- You start breathing deeper and faster.
- Your breath smells sweet.
- You start to tremble, feel weak and drowsy, and then feel confused or dizzy, or start seeing double.

You feel uncoordinated.

## How do I check my blood sugar level?

To check your blood sugar level, you'll need to prick your finger to get a drop of blood for the test. Spring-loaded devices, which prick your finger when you press them against your skin, make this simple and less painful.

After you prick your finger, you place the drop of blood onto a test strip. The test strip will change color. The color tells you how much sugar is in your blood.

You then either insert the strip into a blood sugar meter or compare the color of the strip to a color chart to figure out your blood sugar level.

#### **Tips on blood sugar testing**

- Wash your hands and dry them well before doing the test.
- Pay attention to expiration dates for test strips.
- Use a big enough drop of blood.
- Be sure your meter is set right.
- Keep your meter clean.
- Check the batteries of your meter.
- Follow the instructions for the test carefully.

Write down the results and show them to your doctor.

## **How often should I check my blood sugar level?**

Check your blood sugar as often as your doctor suggests. You'll probably need to do it more often at first. You'll also check it more often when you feel sick or stressed, when you're changing your medicine, or if you're pregnant. People taking insulin may need to check their levels more often.

Keep track of your blood sugar levels by writing them down. You can also keep track of what you've eaten and how active you've been during the day. This will help you see how eating and exercise affect your blood sugar level.

## **What should my blood sugar level be?**

Talk with your doctor about what range of blood sugar levels is best for you. A level of 80 to 120 before meals is often a good goal, but not everyone with diabetes can get their blood sugar levels this low.

Be sure to talk with your doctor about what to do if your blood sugar level isn't within the range that's best for you.

## **How does food affect my blood sugar level?**

Anytime you eat, you put sugar in your blood. Eating the right way can help control your blood sugar level.

It's important for you to learn how what you eat affects your blood sugar level, how you feel and your overall health. As a general rule, just following a healthy diet is wise. Your doctor may help you find a dietitian

who can help you learn how to make wise food choices. See the box below for some tips on eating right.

### **Tips on eating right**

- Eat at about the same time every day. This helps keep your insulin or medicine and sugar levels steady.
- Try to eat 3 times a day. Have a snack at bedtime if you're taking medicine or insulin. Avoid other snacking unless you're exercising or treating hypoglycemia.
- If you're overweight, lose weight. Even losing just a little weight, such as 5 to 15 pounds, can lower your blood sugar levels.
- Eat plenty of fiber. Green leafy vegetables, grains and fruits are good choices. Fiber helps you feel full.

Eat fewer "empty" calories, such as foods high in sugar and fat, and alcohol.

## **What about smoking and alcohol?**

You should stop smoking as soon as possible. It's probably okay to drink some alcohol. But it's best not to have more than about 1 serving a day with a meal. A serving is 4 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. If you drink on an empty stomach, you risk causing a drop in your blood sugar.

## **Will exercising help my blood sugar level?**

Yes. Exercising is especially good for people who have diabetes because it can help the body better use insulin, resulting in a lower blood sugar level.

Exercise is also good for your heart, your cholesterol levels, your blood pressure and your weight--all factors that can affect your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Exercise also seems to make people feel better about themselves and feel less anxious.

Talk with your doctor about starting an exercise program. He or she can help you make a plan.

## **What is a glycosylated hemoglobin test?**

It's a blood test your doctor may do. One common type of glycosylated hemoglobin is hemoglobin A<sub>1c</sub>. The hemoglobin A<sub>1c</sub> level helps show how well your blood sugar has been controlled during the previous 1 to 3 months. It helps your doctor see how effective your treatment is and decide if any changes are needed.