

## What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic disease that occurs either when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces. Insulin is a hormone that regulates blood sugar, which gives us the energy that we need to have. If it cannot get into the cells to be burned as energy, sugar builds up to harmful levels in the blood.

There are 3 main forms of diabetes mellitus. People with type 1 diabetes typically make none of their own insulin and therefore require insulin injections to survive. People with type 2 diabetes, the form that comprises some 90% of cases, usually produce their own insulin, but not enough or they are unable to use it properly. People with type 2 diabetes are typically overweight and sedentary, 2 Conditions that raise a person's insulin needs.

Gestational diabetes is a special form of the disease. It occurs when a pregnant woman has blood glucose levels above normal but still below those considered for diabetics. Women with gestational diabetes are at an increased risk of complications. They are also at increased risk of type 2 diabetes in the future.

## How big is the problem?

Globally, across all ages, it is estimated that at least 1 in 20 deaths are attributable to diabetes, and in adults aged 35 to 64 the proportion is at least 1 in 10 deaths. If the current trend continues it is estimated that by 2030 the number of people with diabetes will more than double. WHO also

projects that diabetes will be the leading cause of death by 2030.

More than 80% of those occurring in low and middle income countries and in Zimbabwe the prevalence of 10 was obtained in the STEPS survey of 2005.

Who is at risk?

The following are the major factors associated with diabetes:

- Being overweight or obese.
- Being physically inactive exercising fewer than three times a week.
- Having a parent, brother or sister with diabetes.
- Having a prior history of gestational diabetes or birth of at least one baby weighing more than +Kg
- Having high blood pressure measuring 140/90 or higher.
- Having abnormal cholesterol (fat in the Blood) with HDL ("good") cholesterol is 35 Or lower, or triglyceride level is 250 or higher.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Diabetes has plenty of early Signs and symptoms, but they're subtle enough that you might not notice. As a result, it is estimated that 25 percent of people with type 2 diabetes don't even know it. If you experience some of these subtle signs and symptoms, talk to your doctor about getting tested. Symptoms occur because some or all of the glucose stays in

The main symptoms, which are common to both type 1 diabetes and type 2 diabetes, are:

- Urinating more often than usual, particularly at night
- Feeling very thirsty
- Feeling very tired
- Unexplained weight loss
- Itching around the penis or vagina, or Frequent episodes of thrush
- Cuts or wounds that heal slowly
- Blurred vision (caused by the lens of the eye becoming dry)

The signs and symptoms of type 1 diabetes are usually obvious and develop very quickly, often over a few weeks.

The signs and symptoms of type 2 diabetes aren't always as obvious, and it's often diagnosed during a routine check-up. This is because the symptoms are often mild and develop gradually over a number of years. This means that you may have type 2 diabetes for many years without realising it.

### What are the complications?

Diabetes complications are due to damage to small blood vessels and damage to larger blood vessels. Complications associated with damage to small blood vessels include damage to eyes (retinopathy) leading to blindness, to kidneys (nephropathy) leading to renal failure and to nerves (neuropathy) leading to impotence and diabetic foot disorders (which include severe infections leading to amputations). Those associated with damage to larger blood vessels include cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks, strokes and insufficiency in blood flow to legs. There is evidence that good control of both type 1 and 2 diabetes can delay the onset and progression of these complications.

### How is diabetes prevented?

Simple lifestyle measures have been shown to be effective in preventing or delaying the onset of type 2 diabetes. To prevent type 2 diabetes and its complications you should:

- Achieve and maintain healthy body- Body Mass Index (BMI) measure of your weight relative to your height provides an important tool for checking if you are maintaining a healthy body weight.
- Be physically active - at least 30 minutes of regular moderate intensity activity daily. More activity is required for weight control.
- Eat a healthy diet which includes between 3 and 5 servings of fruit and vegetables a day and reduce sugar and saturated fats intake

**Avoid tobacco use** – smoke increases risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Having your blood sugar levels checked regularly is important in preventing complications associated with diabetes.

### What you should know about treatment?

Diabetes is treatable. Diabetes can be controlled and managed to prevent complications. Increasing access to diagnosis, self-management education and affordable treatment are vital components of the response. Treatment involves lowering blood sugar levels and the levels of other unknown risk factors that damage blood vessels. Tobacco cessation is also important to avoid complications.



## FOR HELP

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**WHAT YOU NEED  
TO KNOW ABOUT  
DIABETES**

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