



About Diabetes

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Did you know? Sixty million Americans are unaware they have diabetes or are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes.

What is diabetes? Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy needed for daily life. The cause of diabetes continues to be a mystery, although both genetics and environmental factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play roles.

There are 20.8 million children and adults in the United States, or 7% of the population, who have diabetes. While an estimated 14.6 million have been diagnosed with diabetes, unfortunately, 6.2 million people (or nearly one-third) are unaware that they have the disease.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes. In type 2 diabetes, either the body does not produce enough insulin or the cells ignore the insulin. Insulin is necessary for the body to be able to use glucose for energy. When you eat food, the body breaks down all of the sugars and starches into glucose, which is the basic fuel for the cells in the body. Insulin takes the sugar from the blood into the cells. When glucose builds up in the blood instead of going into cells, it can cause two problems:

- Right away, your cells may be starved for energy.
- Over time, high blood glucose levels may hurt your eyes, kidneys, nerves or heart.

Finding out you have diabetes is scary. But don't panic. Type 2 diabetes is serious, but people with diabetes can live long, healthy, happy lives.

Who's at risk? Your risk for type 2 diabetes increases as you get older, gain too much weight, or if you do not stay active. Diabetes is more common in African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include:

- * Having high blood pressure (at or above 130/80)
- * Having a family history of diabetes
- * Having diabetes during pregnancy or having a baby weighing more than nine pounds at birth.

What can you do? Take the Diabetes Risk Test. The test is available on line at <http://main.diabetes.org/site/R?i=tjFblRSoFxmF2XVLGFmQQQ>. If you don't have access to a computer and think you might be at risk for the disease, make an appointment with your doctor and talk with her/him about your concerns.

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<http://www.diabetes.org/about-diabetes.jsp>*

