

Diabetes

What is diabetes?

To break down glucose (sugar) into fuel, our bodies need insulin. When a person has diabetes, the pancreas either does not produce insulin or does not produce enough insulin, or the body cannot use the insulin that is produced. When insulin is not available, the energy from food stays in the blood stream and blood sugars rise.

The two main types of diabetes are type 1 and type 2. Type 1, or insulin-dependent diabetes, occurs when the pancreas no longer produces insulin. It often appears in early adolescence, though it may occur at any age. Type 2, or non-insulin dependent diabetes, occurs when the pancreas still produces insulin but either does not produce enough to meet the body's needs or the body has trouble using what is produced. Type 2 diabetes mainly affects adults. Approximately 90 per cent of people with diabetes have Type 2 diabetes.

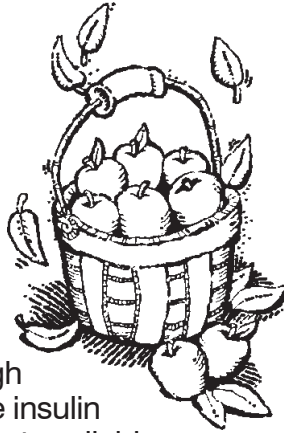
What causes diabetes?

Although there are several theories, there is no known cause of diabetes.

What are some of the symptoms of diabetes?

When blood sugar levels are high, the body responds with symptoms such as:

- unusual thirst
- frequent urination
- unexplained weight loss
- extreme fatigue
- irritability



However, in Type 2 diabetes, it is possible to have no apparent symptoms.

If you experienced any of the symptoms or suspect for any reason that you have diabetes, see your doctor.

How can I control my diabetes?

Diabetes requires 24-hour a day management. Some factors to consider include:

- **Meal planning**

What you eat, how much you eat, and when you eat are important in controlling the amount of sugar in your body. A registered dietitian can help you plan meals and snacks.

- **Activity**

Regular activity can help reduce blood sugar levels, improve circulation, maintain suitable weight and make you feel better. Consult your doctor before increasing your current activity level.

- **Medication**

Type 1 diabetes is managed through a combination of insulin, diet and exercise. Type 2 diabetes can usually be controlled through diet and exercise though some people may require diabetic pills and/or insulin.

It is important to follow directions regarding the timing of medications and meals. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking ANY other medication, prescribed or over-the-counter (e.g., cold remedies).

- **Monitoring Diabetes**

Regularly keeping track of blood sugar levels shows how well the diabetes is controlled. A health professional will be able to tell you how to do this. It is important to keep a written record of the levels.

- **Feet**

Diabetes can reduce the flow of blood to your feet and reduce feeling. This can result in injuries going unnoticed. Wear comfortable shoes and avoid going barefoot. Examine your feet every day for redness, cuts, cracks, swelling, bruises or blisters. If there are any changes obtain professional care immediately.

- **Teeth**

If you have diabetes it is easier to get a gum infection. Good dental care and regular check-ups help prevent problems. Make sure to tell your dentist you have diabetes.

- **Eyes**

Diabetes can cause eye problems, even before you notice changes in your vision. Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor (ophthalmologist) at least once a year. If you notice any vision changes, have your eyes checked immediately.

Complications

When diabetes is poorly managed, the following complications may occur:

- blindness
- amputation
- painful legs
- end-stage kidney disease
- cardiac problems

With good management, 50 to 80 percent of complications are preventable.

Note:

People who have diabetes should wear or carry information which identifies them as a person with diabetes in case of an emergency.

Be informed

You have the power to manage your diabetes. The more you know about the disease, the easier it is for you to control it. This fact sheet is a brief overview and is general in nature. Obtain more detailed information from:

- your doctor or a diabetes educator
- Canadian Diabetes Association (New Brunswick Division) Toll free: 1-800-884-4232.

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The office welcomes your comments and gladly accepts suggestions for topics which you would like to see addressed.

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