



Diabetes...How to Reduce the Risk

Have you heard of diabetes?

The number of people with diabetes is rising. More than two million Canadians have the disease, yet a third of them do not even know anything about it. Diabetes can often start slowly with few or no symptoms for many years.

Why is it important to know about diabetes?

Untreated diabetes can lead to serious health problems such as heart disease, blindness, loss of limbs and kidney disease.

The good news is that there is a lot that can be done to prevent this serious disease or reduce the risk of health problems.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes affects the body's ability to use the energy we get from food. Glucose is a type of sugar that our body uses as energy. The body changes food into glucose so that it can use it for energy. Glucose is found in the blood after eating a meal. Insulin is a hormone made by the body. It helps glucose move into cells so that it can be used as energy. Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not make enough insulin or can not use the insulin it makes.

What are the different types of diabetes?

There are three types of diabetes – type 1 diabetes, gestational diabetes, and type 2 diabetes.

Type 1 Diabetes

Type 1 diabetes occurs when a person's body can't make insulin or doesn't make enough insulin. Type 1 affects 10 per cent of people with diabetes. It is usually diagnosed during childhood. People with type 1 diabetes need insulin injections. If you have been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, there are key things you can do that will help you stay healthy and avoid the health problems that can result from this disease. You can talk to your health care team about how to stay healthy. Your health care team could include a doctor, a nurse and a dietitian.

Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes can happen during pregnancy. It affects 3 – 4 four percent of pregnant women and 8 – 18 percent of pregnant Aboriginal women. Women with gestational diabetes do not make enough insulin or their body is not able to use it well. Many women can control this through diet and exercise, but some may need to take insulin. Gestational diabetes goes away when the baby is born, but both the woman and her baby are more at risk of getting type 2 diabetes later on in life.

There is little that can be done to prevent type 1 diabetes and gestational diabetes.

Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body makes insulin but cannot use it properly, or the amount of insulin is too small to help the body. It usually occurs in adults over 40, but rates are rising in younger people and even in children.

About 90 per cent of people with diabetes have type 2. This type of diabetes can be managed through changes to lifestyle habits, but many times pills and/or insulin injections are needed as well.

There is more that can be done to prevent type 2 diabetes.

What are the risk factors?

Being:

- 40 years of age or older
- overweight or carrying most of your weight around your middle
- a member of a high risk group – Aboriginal, African, Asian, Hispanic or South Asian descent

Having:

- a family history of diabetes – parent, brother, sister or grandparent
- given birth to a baby that weighs over 4 kg (9 lb) at birth or a history of gestational diabetes
- glucose tolerance or fasting glucose levels outside of the normal range
- high cholesterol and/or high blood pressure and/or heart disease
- health concerns related to diabetes such as eye, nerve or kidney problems

Being diagnosed with any of the following conditions:

- schizophrenia
- polycystic ovary syndrome
- acanthosis nigricans (darkened patches of skin)

What can I do to prevent or delay type 2 diabetes?

Even if you have some risk factors that you may not be able to change, such as age and family history, there are some key risk factors that you **do have control over**. Scientists are doing research in the area of diabetes prevention and recent studies have shown that even small changes in your lifestyle can prevent or delay the start of type 2 diabetes in people who are at risk for the disease.

What does it take to have a healthy lifestyle?

Healthy eating and physical activity are important steps you can take to help you live a healthy life and prevent disease.

Myth: “I have been told I have borderline diabetes.”

“Borderline diabetes” does not exist. You either have diabetes or you don’t. It is important to talk with your doctor to understand your test results, so you can follow the important steps that will help you stay healthy. If your blood glucose test is high, but not high enough to give you a diagnosis of diabetes, your doctor may call this “impaired glucose tolerance” or “impaired fasting glucose.” The doctor will check your blood glucose from time to time. Lifestyle changes such as eating healthy and doing more physical activity are important steps to prevent or delay type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Make healthy eating a part of your life every day

All foods can fit into healthy eating.

Healthy eating is not about one food or one meal eaten in a day; it is the everyday pattern of the foods you eat that make up a healthy eating lifestyle. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Enjoy eating well. Remember to take time to share your meals with family and friends. It is one of the great pleasures in life!

- Balance your meals by choosing foods from each of the four food groups. ***Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*** can help you guide your food choices. (To get a free copy, call Toronto Health Connection at 416-338-7600)
- Go for variety. Make choices from different food groups and try different foods within each group.
- Learn to listen to your body. Eat when you are hungry; stop when you reach your “just full” feeling. If you are feeling uncomfortable, you have probably eaten too much. This may take some practise, because it is a feeling that many of us usually don’t listen to.



- Try to eat more vegetables, fruit and whole grains.
- Choose lower fat dairy products, lean meats and food cooked with little or no fat.
- Limit salt, alcohol and caffeine.

Let's get moving! Enjoy being active every day

Do you think being active requires a lot of time and effort? Read on to find out how easy it is to enjoy active living.

- Gardening, walking, dancing or playing with the kids are all ways you can enjoy being more active.
- It's never too late to start being active. Start off slowly and work your way up to 30-60 minutes of medium to fast physical activity every day. Get your heart beating faster!
- Being active doesn't have to mean going to the gym or taking exercise classes. There are many ways you can be more active. Try different activities and choose what is right for you.
- Every little bit counts – park your car and walk, and/or take the stairs more often.
- You can spread out your activity through the day – build in 10 minutes of activity at least three times a day.
- Get a copy of Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living. It's a first step to getting started. (To get a free copy, call Toronto Health Connection at 416-338-7600).

Healthy eating and active living can help you have more energy, feel less stressed and feel good about yourself. Together, a balance between eating well and being active can help to make you healthier and reduce the risk of diabetes and other diseases.

Remember...even taking small steps can make a big difference. Ask yourself what steps you can take towards a healthier lifestyle.



Myth: “Type 2 diabetes is not serious.”

All types of diabetes are serious. Illness caused by constant high blood glucose is a leading cause of disability and death among Canadians. Diabetes can be managed but a cure for diabetes has not yet been found. Good management through lifestyle changes, pills and/or insulin, is important in slowing down and even preventing the health problems of this disease.

Myth: “Eating too much sugar can lead to diabetes.”

Eating too much sugar is not the cause of diabetes. Diabetes is a complex disease that is likely caused by a number of factors such as genetics and lifestyle. Once a person is diagnosed with diabetes, it is important to limit sugar intake. Talk to a dietitian about how sugar can be included in your healthy eating lifestyle.

How would I know if I had diabetes?

These are some of the symptoms to be aware of:

- Being very thirsty
- Losing or gaining weight
- Blurred vision
- Numbness/tingling in hands or feet
- Urinating often
- Feeling very tired, lack of energy
- Frequent or recurring infections
- Slow healing cuts or sores

If you are 40 years of age or older, you are at risk of type 2 diabetes and should be tested at least every three years. If you have any of the other risk factors for diabetes, you may need to be tested more often, regardless of your age.

If you have been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, changes towards a healthier lifestyle are important in controlling diabetes and can help prevent further health problems caused by the disease.

For more information

If you think you may be at risk or if you feel you have any of the symptoms of diabetes, talk to your family doctor.

Some other sources of information

- Canadian Diabetes Association
1-800-BANTING (226-8464)
www.diabetes.ca
- Contact your local hospital or community health centre to find out about programs and services available at the nearest diabetes education centre.

Useful Websites

- Health Canada – ***Canada's Food Guide*** and ***Physical Activity Guide***
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english
- Canadian Health Network – Healthy eating
www.canadian-health-network.ca/1healthy_eating.html
- Women's Health Matters
www.womenshealthmatters.ca
- Dietitians of Canada
www.dietitians.ca