NDEP **National Diabetes Education Program**
A program of the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

ENGLISH

Diabetes: What Is It?

Diabetes is a disease that affects how the body uses food for energy. Because the body's cells cannot use food properly, the blood glucose (sugar) becomes high. The blood sugar becomes high either because the body lacks insulin or because it cannot use the insulin it makes. Insulin is a hormone that helps glucose get into the cells for energy. Diabetes is diagnosed when the fasting blood sugar is above 126 mg/dl when tested at least twice. There are three types of diabetes:

Type 1

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in children and young adults. It's always treated with insulin. A healthy diet that controls starches and sugars (carbohydrates) is important. Regular exercise can reduce risk for heart disease and other complications.

Symptoms include sudden weight loss, excessive thirst and hunger, frequent urination, nausea, vomiting, poor growth, and lack of energy. If type 1 diabetes is not treated, a condition called ketosis occurs. Ketosis can cause coma and even death.

Type 2

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in older adults. However, it is now becoming more common in children and teens. Those with type 2 diabetes are often overweight and unfit. They cannot make enough insulin to keep their blood sugar in control. A meal plan for weight control and regular exercise is often the first treatment tried. If diet and exercise are not enough, medicine may be required.

Various diabetes pills can be used. If diabetes pills don't work, insulin shots may be needed. The doctor decides what medicine works best.

Symptoms for type 2 diabetes usually are not obvious. In fact, people vary from merely feeling tired to having symptoms similar to type 1 diabetes. If you have diabetes in the family, have your blood sugar checked yearly by the doctor. Finding diabetes early is the best way to prevent serious problems later.

Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes only occurs with pregnancy. It is usually controlled with a special meal plan and exercise. If medicine is needed, only insulin can be used. Diabetes pills are not safe for the baby. Screening will be done around the 26th week of the pregnancy, or earlier if the woman is at high risk.

Women at high risk include those with a history of large babies, a previous history of gestational diabetes, or a history of stillbirths or miscarriages and those who are overweight or who have a history of diabetes in the family. As a woman gets older, she is more likely to get gestational diabetes.

After delivery, the woman will be tested again for diabetes. Most women do not have diabetes then. However, having gestational diabetes greatly increases a woman's risk for type 2 diabetes later in life. Women who are overweight and inactive are most at risk.

Why Worry About Diabetes?

Diabetes is serious. No one has "a little bit of sugar," just as no one is a "little bit pregnant." High blood sugar causes serious health problems. Diabetes health care costs in the United States were $132 billion in 2002.

▶ Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States.

▶ Heart disease and stroke are two to four times more common in those with diabetes.

▶ Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults.

▶ Diabetes is the leading cause of end stage kidney disease.

▶ More than half the amputations of the feet and legs are due to diabetes.

▶ Gum disease occurs in 30 percent of those over age 19 who have diabetes.

▶ Sixty to seventy percent of those with diabetes have some nerve damage.

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT CONTROLLING BLOOD SUGAR CAN PREVENT OR DELAY THESE PROBLEMS!

Good diabetes care requires permanent lifestyle changes. Diabetes cannot be cured. It can only be managed by a healthy meal plan, regular exercise, medicine, and frequent blood tests, using a blood sugar meter. Working with a medical team, including a doctor, dietitian, nurse, exercise specialist, pharmacist, eye doctor, podiatrist, and mental health professional can make it easier to make these changes.