

Understanding type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes. It affects 85–90% of all people with diabetes.

What is type 2 diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition where there is too much glucose (sugar) in the bloodstream. Glucose is an important source of energy for your body. It comes from carbohydrate foods that you eat, such as bread, pasta, rice, cereals, fruits, starchy vegetables, milk and yoghurt. Your body breaks down carbohydrates into glucose, which then enters your bloodstream.

Insulin is made in your body by the pancreas. Insulin is needed to allow glucose from the bloodstream to enter the body cells and be used for energy.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body resists the effects of insulin and cannot make enough insulin to maintain blood glucose levels within the target range. This leads to high blood glucose levels.

Who is at risk of type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in adults, but younger people – and even children – are now developing this type of diabetes.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include:

- » having a family history of type 2 diabetes
- » having pre-diabetes
- » being above the healthy weight range

- » having an inactive lifestyle
- » increasing age
- » having an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
- » being from a Melanesian, Polynesian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern or Indian background
- » having prior gestational diabetes
- » having polycystic ovary syndrome
- » taking some types of antipsychotic or steroid medications.

Can type 2 diabetes be prevented or cured?

People who are at risk of type 2 diabetes can delay and, in some cases, even prevent developing diabetes by adopting a healthy lifestyle. This includes regular physical activity, making healthy food choices, and being a healthy weight.



There is no cure for type 2 diabetes, but if well managed you can continue to lead a healthy life. Recent research has shown that losing weight and keeping it off in some cases can slow the progression of type 2 diabetes.

What are the symptoms of type 2 diabetes?

The symptoms of type 2 diabetes can include:

- » being thirsty and drinking more than usual
- » going to the toilet (to pass urine) more often
- » feeling tired and low on energy
- » sores or cuts that won't heal
- » blurred vision
- » itching and skin infections
- » pain or tingling in the legs or feet.

Often, people don't notice these symptoms, or they may appear slowly over time. Some people may not have any symptoms at all. In some cases, the first sign of diabetes may be a complication such as a foot ulcer, heart attack or vision problem.

How is type 2 diabetes managed?

Type 2 diabetes is managed with healthy eating and regular physical activity. Over time, you may also need glucose-lowering medications (tablets or injectable medications). As diabetes progresses, some people will need insulin injections to help keep their blood glucose levels in the target range.

Looking after your diabetes is important for good health and for preventing diabetes complications, such as damage to the eyes, kidneys, nerves and blood vessels.



How is type 2 diabetes diagnosed?

There are three ways of diagnosing type 2 diabetes:

- A blood glucose test (not just a finger prick test), which needs to be analysed by a pathology lab. This may be done as either a fasting test (after having nothing to eat or drink for at least eight hours) or a non-fasting test.
- An oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT), which is done at a pathology lab. You will have a fasting blood glucose test first, then you will be given a sugary drink and have your blood tested two hours after this.
- A HbA1c test, which reflects your average blood glucose level over the last 10 to 12 weeks. This is also a pathology test but fasting is not needed.

Who can help with your diabetes?

Managing diabetes is a team effort involving you, your family, friends and health professionals. There are many different health professionals who can help you, including:

- » your general practitioner
- » an endocrinologist (diabetes specialist)
- » a credentialled diabetes educator or diabetes nurse practitioner
- » an accredited practising dietitian
- » an accredited exercise physiologist
- » a registered podiatrist
- » a counsellor, social worker or psychologist.

The NDSS and you

A wide range of services and support is available through the NDSS to help you manage your diabetes. This includes information on diabetes management through the NDSS Helpline and website. The products, services and education programs available can help you stay on top of your diabetes.

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