

MEN'S HEALTH LETTER

A newsletter by the Men's Health & Education Center

Diabetes Awareness Month: Frequently Asked Questions:



By Beth Klein

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition in which your body has higher blood sugar levels than normal.

There are two major types of diabetes:

Type II Diabetes Mellitus is the more common type in which your blood sugars are high because your tissues have become more resistant to Insulin, a hormone that lowers your blood sugar by stimulating your tissues to take in sugar from your blood. By being resistant to Insulin, your tissues do not take in as much sugar from your blood as normal, so blood sugar is higher.

Type I Diabetes Mellitus occurs when your body does not produce Insulin. Without Insulin, your tissues cannot take in sugar from your blood. This tends to be a genetic disease that typically is diagnosed in childhood but can occur at any age. People with Type I Diabetes have to take Insulin every day.

The major difference between Type II and Type I is that Type II Diabetes development is more dependent on your health habits (exercise, diet) and is thus more preventable.

What do blood sugar levels mean?

Your blood sugar levels (or blood glucose) are a measure of how much free sugar (glucose) is available in your blood for your muscles and tissues to use as energy. The range for an average healthy person is between 60 and 100 mg/dL. Your blood sugar goes up after you eat, and tends to be in the lower range when you are hungry.

A blood sugar test is an easy and quick test that can be done at home and at the clinic with a blood glucose monitor. If your blood sugar is higher than 100, your health care provider may wish to try further blood sugar tests. Another test is the Hemoglobin A1C, which measures your average blood sugar levels over the past three months. A fasting plasma glucose test is done after not having anything to eat or drink for at least 8 hours. Your provider can use these tests to determine your body's control of blood sugar over time.

Why should I be concerned with my blood sugar levels?

Blood sugar levels need to be kept in the normal range to prevent damage to your body. If your sugars are too low, your tissues will not be able to function as well because there isn't enough sugar to provide them energy. High blood sugar is also a concern because these molecules are sharp and cause direct damage to your blood vessels, and it increases resistance to Insulin over time.

Normally your body is able to regulate your blood sugar so that it stays in that normal range (60-100), but when diabetes develops it is more difficult for your body to maintain those normal levels.

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What can I do to keep myself from developing diabetes?

There are several things that you can do now to help your body regulate its sugar and keep diabetes from developing:

- Fitness - regular physical activity, such as running, dancing, or basketball, helps your body use your blood sugar and Insulin properly. Find activities you enjoy, and aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes on at least 5 days per week.
- Healthy diet - what you eat and how much of it you eat are huge determinants for your body's ability to control its blood sugar. For many, this means increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables you eat, and decreasing the amount of processed foods such as fast food.
- Weight loss - a healthy weight makes it easier for your body to control its blood sugars. Being overweight or obese are major risk factors for eventually developing diabetes, even if your sugars are normal right now.

What do I do if I already have diabetes?

- Have no fear - though diabetes is a serious concern, *it is not a death sentence*. You can take steps to manage your blood sugars and take care of yourself in order to avoid complications of diabetes.
- Set goals for yourself - make sure they are specific, reasonable, and measurable, and give yourself a timeline! Rather than "I will get my sugars down by eating better", think "I will get my sugars down to 150 by drinking less soda and eating less candy over the next month".
- Talk to your provider - your health care provider is a great resource for advice on how to eat well, lose weight, or take your medications properly. Find a provider with whom you feel comfortable and open, so that you may talk to them about any concerns you have.

Remember, you have the power to take control of your health and diabetes - you can do it!

You can find more answers to your questions from the American Diabetes Association online at www.diabetes.org or by phone at 1-800-DIABETES.

Staying Healthy Over the Holidays

By Ninah Divine

A "healthy" holiday does not sound very desirable at first. In reality, a healthy holiday does not have to mean putting vegetables in your mac and cheese. It can mean being thoughtful about mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health during this season. Thinking about health over the holidays broadly might set you up to make good decisions and not feel overly guilty about others.

Considering all the time demands over the holidays between work, travel, cooking, and family, there are practical ways to be healthy. Dedicate 20 or 30 minutes to playing with the little ones in your family. A game of tag or a snowball fight can get your heart rate up, giving your heart the exercise it needs while you connect with family. When enjoying all your favorite holiday dishes and drinks consider portion size and drink plenty of water. Try not to feel bad about eating a little bit of the foods that remind you of family because togetherness and connection are important parts of this season as well.

Lastly, plan ways to decompress from the stress of finances and family through exercise, humor, or a good night's rest. However you celebrate your holidays, prioritize your all around health.

