Diabetes

Dancing the Sugar Blues Boogie

Diabetes is a serious disease. If not diagnosed and treated early, it can result in blindness, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, birth defects, and limb loss. What’s more, diabetes kills approximately 200,000 people each year.

Startlingly, you may not know you have it. Onset is often gradual and difficult to identify—you can have diabetes without any symptoms. In fact, half of those affected don’t even know they have the disease until they seek help for one of its complications. Diabetes is a growing disease—800,000 new cases of diabetes are diagnosed each year—a number that is expected to rise as baby boomers age.

There are two main types of diabetes—type 1 and type 2. Both are caused by the body’s inability to produce or properly use insulin—a hormone that maintains the proper level of sugar in your blood.

**Type 1 Diabetes:** Type 1 diabetes is often diagnosed in children and young adults, and may have a sudden and severe onset, requiring emergency medical care. The body’s immune system attacks and destroys the ability of the pancreas to make insulin, so people with type 1 diabetes must eat a special diet, get regular exercise, check their blood sugar levels, and give themselves shots of insulin several times throughout the day.

**Type 2 Diabetes:** Ninety to 95 percent of people with diabetes have type 2. It is usually diagnosed in older adults, although overweight children sometimes develop it as well. It is caused by the pancreas not making enough insulin, or the body not using it well. People can have type 2 diabetes for years without symptoms, yet it is still damaging to their bodies.

**Signs & Symptoms**

The symptoms of diabetes may be hard to recognize, and are sometimes mistaken for signs of aging. The risk factors for diabetes, however, are straightforward.

**Symptoms:**

- Increased thirst
- Extreme hunger
- Frequent urination
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue, dizziness, and weakness
- Trouble seeing or blurred vision
- Sores that heal slowly
- Recurring infections of the skin, bladder, and vagina
Diabetes (continued)

Risk Factors:
- Being 45 years of age or older
- A family history of diabetes
- Being overweight or obese
- Having high blood pressure—140/90 mmHg or higher
- Leading a sedentary lifestyle
- Being a Native American, African American, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- Having a baby weighing more than nine pounds at birth

When To Seek Care
Diabetes is a serious condition that requires the regular attention of a healthcare provider. With that in mind, seek immediate emergency care in the following situations.
- If a known diabetic is unconscious
- If you or a loved one is exhibiting the classic signs of diabetes (increased thirst, extreme hunger, frequent urination, etc.)
- If blood sugar drops and cannot be restored within fifteen minutes after ingesting a sugary substance
- If a diabetic is unable to eat or is vomiting
- If a known diabetic suspects she is pregnant

Managing Diabetes
There is no cure for diabetes yet, but there is much you can do to manage the disease. Include the following in your diabetes management plan.
- Monitor blood sugar levels.
- Take insulin and other medications as directed.
- Manage your weight.
- Eat small, regular meals that include lots of fiber (fruits, vegetables, and whole grains).
- Exercise regularly (moderate exercise for 30 minutes most days of the week—check with your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise program).
- Communicate regularly with your healthcare professional.
- Have your eyes and feet checked by a healthcare provider every year and closely monitor blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Be cautious if drinking alcohol (check blood sugar levels as needed, and make sure to eat either before or while you drink).

A Self-Care Essential
Weighty Matters. According to the American Diabetes Association, nearly 90 percent of all people with newly diagnosed type 2 diabetes are overweight. And with about 60 percent of Americans now overweight or obese, it's no surprise that 800,000 new cases of diabetes are reported each year. But remember, it is possible to lose weight and keep it off. Talk with your healthcare provider to develop a strategy that's right for you.

Take Test