

DIABETES

WHAT IS DIABETES?



Diabetes is a group of diseases characterized by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both. Diabetes can be associated with serious complications and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to control the disease and lower the risk of complications.

Types of diabetes

Type 1 diabetes was previously called insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) or juvenile-onset diabetes. Type 1 diabetes develops when the body's immune system destroys pancreatic beta cells, the only cells in the body that make the hormone insulin that regulates blood glucose. This form of diabetes usually strikes children and young adults, although disease onset can occur at any age. Type 1 diabetes may account for 5% to 10% of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. Risk factors for type 1 diabetes include autoimmune, genetic, and environmental factors.

Type 2 diabetes was previously called non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) or adult-onset diabetes. Type 2 diabetes may account for about 90% to 95% of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. It usually begins as insulin resistance, a disorder in which the cells do not use insulin properly. As the need for insulin rises, the pancreas gradually loses its ability to produce insulin. Type 2 diabetes is associated with older age, obesity, family history of diabetes, prior history of gestational diabetes, impaired glucose tolerance, physical inactivity, and race/ethnicity. African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, Native Americans, and some Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islanders are at particularly high risk for type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is increasingly being diagnosed in children and adolescents.

Gestational diabetes is a form of glucose intolerance that is diagnosed in some women during pregnancy. Gestational diabetes occurs more frequently among African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Native Americans. It is also more common among obese women and women with a family history of diabetes. During pregnancy, gestational diabetes requires treatment to normalize maternal blood glucose levels to avoid complications in the infant. After pregnancy, 5% to 10% of women with gestational diabetes are found to have type 2 diabetes. Women who have had gestational diabetes have a 20% to 50% chance of developing diabetes in the next 5-10 years.

Other specific types of diabetes result from specific genetic conditions (such as maturity-onset diabetes of youth), surgery, drugs, malnutrition, infections, and other illnesses. Such types of diabetes may account for 1% to 5% of all diagnosed cases of diabetes.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National diabetes fact sheet: general information and national estimates on diabetes in the United States, 2002. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003.