

DIABETES PREVENTION

What is Diabetes?

Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose (sugar) which our bodies use for energy. The pancreas, an organ near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into our body's cells. If you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin very well. This problem causes glucose to build up in the blood and can cause high blood glucose levels. Diabetes is a disease in which blood glucose levels are above normal.

What are the risk factors for diabetes?

- Being 45 years or older
- Being overweight
- Having pre-diabetes (blood glucose higher than normal but lower than the diabetes range)
- Having a family history of a parent, brother or sister with diabetes
- Being of African-American, American Indian, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, or Hispanic American/Latino descent
- Having had gestational diabetes, or giving birth to at least one baby weighing more than nine pounds
- Having high blood pressure (140/90 or higher)
- Having an HDL cholesterol (good cholesterol) level of 35 or lower, or triglycerides of 250 or higher
- Being fairly inactive, exercising fewer than three times a week

However, studies show that people at high risk for diabetes may prevent the disease by losing a small amount of weight, by getting 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week and eating healthier.

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What can you do to help prevent diabetes?

Step 1: Move more.

Getting more physical activity every day will help you burn more calories and lose weight. Try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity, five days per week. If you have not been active, start off slowly, building up to your goal.

Here are some ideas to fit more physical activity into your day.

- When shopping, park a little farther away from the store's entrance. If it's safe, get off the bus a stop or two early and walk the rest of the way.
- When watching television, use the commercial break to take a quick walk around your home or do some exercises such as marching in place.
- Try to schedule walking "dates" with friends or family members throughout the week.

Step 2: Eat healthier.

When it comes to eating healthier to lose weight, it all comes down to choices. Choosing foods that are lower in fat and calories and limiting portion sizes can help you lose the weight you need to prevent diabetes.

Here are some things you can start doing today to eat healthier.

- Choose foods that are lower in fat. Grill or bake your foods instead of frying.
- Buy more fruits and vegetables, and whole-grain foods every time you shop.
- Lighten your recipes and cooking by using low-fat or light versions of ingredients such as sour cream, cream cheese, salad dressings or mayonnaise. Also remember to use less.

Step 3: Start now to help prevent diabetes.

The key to losing weight and preventing diabetes is to make long-term changes that work for you – not quick fixes. Aim to lose weight slowly – 1/2 to one pound a week – by making changes that become a part of your life. Make a plan to change your behavior.

Sources:

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, *Am I At Risk for Type 2 Diabetes?*

National Institutes of Health, NIH Publication No. 04-4805, October 2003

National Diabetes Education Program, *It's Not Too Late to Prevent Diabetes*, National Institutes of Health, April 2004.

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