

Preventing and Managing Diabetes

This tip sheet is a companion to the presentation "Preventing and Managing Diabetes."

Why Should I Be Concerned about Diabetes?

A person with a disability is three times more likely to develop diabetes than a person without a disability. You can play a key role in preventing diabetes in the individuals you support by learning about the disease together.

What Happens in Diabetes?

Much of the food you eat contains carbohydrates. Your body breaks down the carbohydrates into a type of sugar called glucose. Insulin is made by the body to move glucose from the blood into muscles and other cells. **Diabetes** occurs when the body either cannot make enough insulin or cannot properly use the it makes. Without enough insulin, blood insulin sugar levels go up. High blood sugar can make people very sick. That is why blood sugar control is at the center of any diabetes treatment plan.



There are two types of diabetes:

Type 1 Diabetes

In type 1 diabetes, the body can't make insulin so the blood sugar level goes up. Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in childhood and it is treated with insulin injections.

Type 2 Diabetes

In type 2 diabetes, the body makes insulin, but the cells that need the insulin resist using it. When this occurs, the blood sugar level goes up. Type 2 diabetes is more common and it is diagnosed in adulthood.

People with type 2 diabetes may not know it because the symptoms can take a long time to develop. Common symptoms are:

- Feeling tired or lacking energy
- Urinating often
- Constant thirst; drinking a lot.

More severe symptoms can occur, such as sudden weight loss, blurred vision, constant hunger, numbness in the hands or feet, wounds that do not heal, frequent vaginal infections, and sexual and urologic complications.

If the individual you support has any of these symptoms, suggest that they see a doctor. The doctor can diagnose diabetes using a blood glucose test.

Type 2 Diabetes Is Preventable

The following three steps can help you **prevent** type 2 diabetes. Even when diagnosed, these steps are still the first line of defense in **managing** type 2 diabetes.



1. Keep Weight Under Control

Figuring out the Body Mass Index (BMI) is a way to determine someone's weight-related risk. Check it out here: https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm. BMIs between 25-29 indicate that someone is overweight. BMIs of 30+ indicate that someone is obese. Either being overweight or obese places people at increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Losing even a small amount of weight is a good place to start!

2. Eat a Healthy Diet

Plan ahead! Don't try to change everything all at once. Choose one thing and get started. You can find resources on "Eating Right, Staying Active" on DDS Health Toolkit.



3. Be Physically Active

Regular physical activity is key to keeping weight off and to overall good health. A brisk walk for half an hour each day reduces risk. Walk, bike, or garden instead of watching TV.



Who Is More at Risk for Type 2 Diabetes?

- Someone who is overweight or obese, doesn't eat healthily, or isn't physically active.
- Someone older than 40 years old.
- Someone with a parent, sister, or brother who has type 2 diabetes.
- Someone with a past history of diabetes during pregnancy.

People of Hispanic, African-American, Native American, and Asian ethnicity are disproportionately affected by diabetes.

Supporting Someone with Type 2 Diabetes

- Educate yourself! Learn about diabetes and share what you learn.
- Be an active listener. If needed, help the person get support for coping with their feelings.
- Encourage weight control, exercise, and healthy food choices.
- Know the person's treatment plan and how you can support their plan.
- Learn what to do if a person has signs of their blood sugar being too high or too low.
- Be aware of and look for symptoms of possible complications.
- Work with family members and others who support the individual.

Additional Resources

- Learning About Diabetes: <https://learningaboutdiabetes.org/>
- From the Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diabetes/in-depth/diabetes-management/art-20047963>
- Managing Diabetes (from the NIH): <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes/overview/managing-diabetes/4-steps>
- From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-disabilities.html>