Diabetes mellitus is a metabolic disease that causes high blood sugar. Your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't effectively use the insulin it makes.

The hormone insulin moves sugar from the blood into your cells to be stored or used for energy. If this malfunctions, you may have diabetes.

Untreated high blood sugar from diabetes can damage your nerves, eyes, kidneys, and other organs. But educating yourself about diabetes and taking steps to prevent or manage it can help you protect your health.

Types of diabetes

There are a few different types of diabetes:

- **Type 1:** Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease. The immune system attacks and destroys cells in the pancreas, where insulin is made. It's unclear what causes this attack.
- **Type 2:** Type 2 diabetes occurs when your body becomes resistant to insulin, and sugar builds up in your blood. It's the most common type—about 90% to 95%Trusted Source of people living with diabetes have type 2.
- **Type 1.5:** Type 1.5 diabetes is also known as latent autoimmune diabetes in adults (LADA). It occurs during adulthood and sets in gradually like type 2 diabetes. LADA is an autoimmune disease that cannot be treated by diet or lifestyle.
- **Gestational:** Gestational diabetes is high blood sugar during pregnancy. Insulin-blocking hormones produced by the placenta cause this type of diabetes.

A rare condition called diabetes insipidus is not related to diabetes mellitus, although it has a similar name. It's a different condition in which your kidneys remove too much fluid from your body.

Each type of diabetes has unique symptoms, causes, and treatments.

Learn more about how these types differ from one another.

Prediabetes

Prediabetes is the term that's used when your blood sugar is higher than expected, but it's not high enough for a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes. It occurs when the cells in your body don't respond to insulin the way they should. This can lead to type 2 diabetes down the road.

Experts suggest that more than 1 in 3 AmericansTrusted Source have prediabetes, but over 80%Trusted Source of people with prediabetes don't even know it.

Symptoms of diabetes

Diabetes symptoms are caused by rising blood sugar.

General symptoms

The symptoms of type 1, type 2, and type 1.5 (LADA) are the same, but they occur in a shorter period than types 2 and 1.5. In type 2, the onset tends to be slower. Tingling nerves and slow-healing sores are more common in type 2.

Left untreated, type 1, in particular, can lead to diabetic ketoacidosis. This is when there is a dangerous level of ketones in the body. It's less common in other types of diabetes, but still possible.

The general symptoms of diabetes include:

- increased hunger
- increased thirst
- weight loss
- frequent urination
- blurry vision
- extreme fatigue
- sores that don't heal

Symptoms in men

In addition to the general symptoms of diabetes, men with diabetes may have:

- a decreased sex drive
- erectile dysfunction
- poor muscle strength

Symptoms in women

Women with diabetes can have symptoms such as:

- vaginal dryness
- urinary tract infections
- yeast infections
- dry, itchy skin

Gestational diabetes

Most people who develop gestational diabetes don't have any symptoms. Healthcare professionals often detect the condition during a routine blood sugar test or oral glucose tolerance test, which is usually performed between the 24th and 28th weeks of pregnancy.

In rare cases, a person with gestational diabetes will also experience increased thirst or urination.

The bottom line

Diabetes symptoms can be so mild that they're hard to spot at first. Learn which signs should prompt a trip to the doctor.

Causes of diabetes

Different causes are associated with each type of diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes

Doctors don't know exactly what causes type 1 diabetes. For some reason, the immune system mistakenly attacks and destroys insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas.

Genes may play a role in some people. It's also possible that a virus sets off an immune system attack.

Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes stems from a combination of genetics and lifestyle factors. Having overweight or obesity increases your risk, too. Carrying extra weight, especially in your belly, makes your cells more resistant to the effects of insulin on your blood sugar.

This condition runs in families. Family members share genes that make them more likely to get type 2 diabetes and to be overweight.

Type 1.5 diabetes

Type 1.5 is an autoimmune condition that occurs when the pancreas is attacked by your own antibodies. as in type 1. It may be genetic, but more research is needed.

Gestational diabetes

Gestational diabetes occurs as the result of hormonal changes during pregnancy. The placenta produces hormones that make a pregnant person's cells less sensitive to the effects of insulin. This can cause high blood sugar during pregnancy.

People who are overweight when they get pregnant or who gain too much weight during pregnancy are more likely to get gestational diabetes.

The bottom line

Both genes and environmental factors play a role in triggering diabetes.

Get more information on the causes of diabetes.

Diabetes risk factors

Certain factors increase your risk for diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes

You're more likely to get type 1 diabetes if you're a child or teenager, you have a parent or sibling with the condition, or you carry certain genes that are linked to the disease.

Type 2 diabetes

Your risk for type 2 diabetes increases if you:

- are overweight
- are age 45 or older
- have a parent or sibling with the condition
- aren't physically active
- have had gestational diabetes
- have prediabetes

- have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or high triglycerides

Type 2 diabetes also disproportionately affects certain racial and ethnic populations.

Adults who have African American, Hispanic or Latino American, or Asian American ancestry are more likely to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes than white adults, according to 2016 research. They're also more likely to experience decreased quality of care and increased barriers to self-management.

Type 1.5 diabetes

Type 1.5 diabetes is found in adults over 30 and is often mistaken for type 2, but people with this condition are not necessarily overweight, and oral medications and lifestyle changes have no effect.

Gestational diabetes

Your risk for gestational diabetes increases if you:

- are overweight
- are over age 25
- had gestational diabetes during a past pregnancy
- have given birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds
- have a family history of type 2 diabetes
- have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

The bottom line

Your family history, environment, and preexisting medical conditions can all affect your odds of developing diabetes.

Find out which risks you can control and which ones you can't.

Diabetes complications

High blood sugar damages organs and tissues throughout your body. The higher your blood sugar is and the longer you live with it, the greater your risk for complications.

Complications associated with diabetes include:

- heart disease, heart attack, and stroke
- neuropathy
- nephropathy
- retinopathy and vision loss
- hearing loss
- foot damage, such as infections and sores that don't heal
- skin conditions, such as bacterial and fungal infections
- depression
- dementia

Gestational diabetes

Unmanaged gestational diabetes can lead to problems that affect both the mother and baby. Complications affecting the baby can include:

- premature birth
- higher-than-typical weight at birth
- increased risk for type 2 diabetes later in life
- low blood sugar
- jaundice
- stillbirth

A pregnant person with gestational diabetes can develop complications such as high blood pressure (preeclampsia) or type 2 diabetes. You may also require cesarean delivery, commonly referred to as a C-section.

The risk of gestational diabetes in future pregnancies also increases.

The bottom line

Diabetes can lead to serious medical complications, but you can manage the condition with medications and lifestyle changes.

Avoid the most common diabetes complications with these helpful tips.

Treatment of diabetes

Doctors treat diabetes with a few different medications. Some are taken by mouth, while others are available as injections.

Type 1 and 1.5 diabetes

Insulin is the main treatment for type 1 and 1.5 diabetes. It replaces the hormone your body isn't able to produce.

Various types of insulin are commonly used by people with type 1 and 1.5 diabetes. They differ in how quickly they start to work and how long their effects last:

- **Rapid-acting insulin:** starts to work within 15 minutes and its effects last for 2 to 4 hours
- **Short-acting insulin:** starts to work within 30 minutes and lasts 3 to 6 hours
- **Intermediate-acting insulin:** starts to work within 2 to 4 hours and lasts 12 to 18 hours
- **Long-acting insulin:** starts to work 2 hours after injection and lasts up to 24 hours
- **Ultra-long acting insulin:** starts to work 6 hours after injection and lasts 36 hours or more
- **Premixed insulin:** starts working within 15 to 30 minutes (depending on whether a rapid-acting or short-acting insulin is part of the mix) and lasts 10 to 16 hours

Type 2 diabetes

Diet and exercise can help some people manage type 2 diabetes. If lifestyle changes aren't enough to lower your blood sugar, you'll need to take medication.