



Diabetes: What is it?

Diabetes is a disease that affects how the body uses food for energy. Since the body's cells cannot use food properly, the blood sugar becomes high. The high blood sugars are caused by a lack of or not enough insulin. Insulin is a hormone that helps get sugar into the cells for energy. There are three types of diabetes:

TYPE 1

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in children and young adults. It always requires insulin for treatment. A healthy diet with controlled amounts of carbohydrate is important. Regular exercise can reduce risk for heart disease and other complications.

Symptoms include sudden weight loss, excess thirst and hunger, frequent urination nausea, vomiting, poor growth and lack of energy. If type 1 diabetes is not treated, a life-threatening condition called ketosis occurs. Ketosis can cause coma and even death.

TYPE 2

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in older adults. They often are overweight and out-of-shape. They cannot produce enough insulin to keep their blood sugars in control. A weight control diet and regular exercise are the first treatments tried. If diet and exercise are not enough, medication may be required.

Various diabetes pills can be used. If diabetes pills don't work, insulin shots maybe needed. Doctors decide what medicine works best.

Symptoms for Type 2 diabetes usually are not obvious. In fact, people range from only feeling tired to having symptoms like Type 1 diabetes. If you have diabetes in the family, have your blood sugar checked yearly by the doctor. Finding diabetes early is the best way to prevent serious problems later.

GESTATIONAL DIABETES



Gestational diabetes only occurs in pregnancy. It is usually controlled with a special meal plan and exercise. If medication is needed, only insulin can be used. Diabetes pills are not safe for the baby. Screening will be done around the 26th week of the pregnancy or earlier if the woman is at high risk for gestational diabetes.

Women at high risk include those with a history of large babies, a previous history of gestational diabetes, a history of stillbirths or miscarriages or those who are overweight or have a history of diabetes in the family. As a woman gets older, she is more likely to get gestational diabetes.

After delivery, the woman will be tested again for diabetes. Most women do not have diabetes then. However, having gestational diabetes significantly increases a woman's risk for Type 2 diabetes later in life. Women who are overweight and inactive are at most risk.

WHY WORRY ABOUT DIABETES?

Diabetes is serious. No one has “a little bit of sugar” just like no one is a little bit pregnant. High blood sugars cause serious health problems. Diabetes health care costs in Georgia were \$3 billion in 1992.

- Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the U.S.
- Heart disease is two to four times more common in those with diabetes.
- Risk of stroke is two to four times higher in those with diabetes.
- Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults.
- Diabetes is the leading cause of end stage kidney disease.
- More than half the amputations of the feet and legs are due to diabetes.
- Gum disease occurs in 30% of those over age 19 who have diabetes.
- Sixty to seventy percent of those with diabetes have some nerve damage.

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT CONTROLLING BLOOD SUGARS CAN PREVENT OR DELAY THESE PROBLEMS!

Good diabetes care requires permanent lifestyle changes. Diabetes cannot be cured. It can only be managed by a healthy meal plan, regular exercise, medication and frequent blood sugar checks with a blood glucose meter. Working with a medical team including a doctor, dietitian, nurse, exercise specialist and even a mental health professional can make it easier to make these changes.

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