

Preventing Diabetes Problems

Heart Disease & Stroke Diabetes can damage blood vessels and lead to heart disease and stroke. You can do a lot to prevent heart disease and stroke by managing your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels; and by not smoking.

Low Blood Glucose (Hypoglycemia) Hypoglycemia occurs when your blood glucose drops too low. Certain diabetes medicines make low blood glucose more likely. You can prevent hypoglycemia by following your meal plan and balancing your physical activity, food, and medicines. Testing your blood glucose regularly can also help prevent hypoglycemia.

Diabetic Neuropathy Diabetic neuropathy is nerve damage that can result from diabetes. Different types of nerve damage affect different parts of your body. Managing your diabetes can help prevent nerve damage that affects your feet and limbs, and organs such as your heart.

Foot Problems Diabetes can cause nerve damage and poor blood flow, which can lead to serious foot problems. Common foot problems, such as a callus, can lead to pain or an infection that makes it hard to walk. Get a foot checkup at each visit with your health care team.

Eye Disease Diabetes can damage your eyes and lead to low vision and blindness. The best way to prevent eye disease is to manage your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol; and to not smoke. Also, have a dilated eye exam at least once a year.

Gum Disease & Other Dental Problems Diabetes can lead to problems in your mouth, such as infection, gum disease, or dry mouth. To help keep your mouth healthy, manage your blood glucose, brush your teeth twice a day, see your dentist at least once a year, and don't smoke.

Sexual & Bladder Problems Sexual and bladder problems are more common in people with diabetes. Problems like erectile dysfunction, loss of interest in sex, bladder leaks, and retained urine can happen if diabetes damages your blood vessels and nerves. Treatments are available to help control symptoms and restore intimacy.

How can I prevent or delay getting type 2 diabetes?

If you are at risk for diabetes, you may be able to prevent or delay getting it. Most of the things that you need to do involve having a healthier lifestyle. So if you make these changes, you will get other health benefits as well. You may lower your risk of other diseases, and you will probably feel better and have more energy. The changes are:

- Losing weight and keeping it off.** Weight control is an important part of diabetes prevention. You may be able to prevent or delay diabetes by losing 5 to 10% of your current weight. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, your goal would be to lose between 10 to 20 pounds. And once you lose the weight, it is important that you don't gain it back.
- Following a healthy eating plan.** It is important to reduce the amount of calories you eat and drink each day, so you can lose weight and keep it off. To do that, your diet should include smaller portions and less fat and sugar. You should also eat a variety of foods from each food group, including plenty of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. It's also a good idea to limit red meat, and avoid processed meats.
- Get regular exercise.** Exercise has many health benefits, including helping you to lose weight and lower your blood sugar levels. These both lower your risk of type 2 diabetes. Try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days a week. If you have not been active, talk with your health care professional to figure out which types of exercise are best for you. You can start slowly and work up to your goal.
- Don't smoke.** Smoking can contribute to insulin resistance, which can lead to type 2 diabetes. If you already smoke, try to quit.

Talk to your health care provider to see whether there is anything else you can do to delay or to prevent type 2 diabetes. If you are at high risk, your provider may suggest that you take one of a few types of diabetes medicines.

Lifestyle changes can help prevent type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease. Prevention is especially important if you have a higher risk of type 2 diabetes. For example, you may have a higher risk of the disease if you have excess weight or obesity, high cholesterol, or a family history of diabetes. If you've been diagnosed with prediabetes — high blood sugar that doesn't reach the level of a diabetes diagnosis — lifestyle changes can prevent or delay type 2 diabetes. Making a few changes in your lifestyle now may help you avoid serious diabetes health complications in the future. Nerve, kidney and heart damage are a few possible complications you can prevent with some changes. It's never too late to start. Losing weight lowers the risk of diabetes. The American Diabetes Association recommends that people with prediabetes lose at least 5% to 7% of their body weight to prevent diabetes. More weight loss can turn into even greater benefits. People in one large study lowered their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by almost 60% over three years. In this study, they lost about 7% of their body weight with changes in physical activity and diet. Set a weight-loss goal based on your current body weight. Talk to your healthcare professional about reasonable short-term goals and expectations. For example, aim to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week. You can gain many benefits from getting regular physical activity, such as:

- Losing weight.
- Lowering your blood sugar.
- Boosting your sensitivity to insulin — which helps keep your blood sugar within a typical range.
- Increasing your aerobic fitness.

Goals for most adults to promote weight loss and keep a healthy weight include:

- Aerobic activity.** Aim for about 30 minutes or more of moderate aerobic activity — such as brisk walking, swimming or biking — on most days of the week. Get at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week. Or get at least 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity — such as running or swimming laps — a week.
- Strength training.** Do strength training for all major muscle groups at least two times a week to increase your strength, balance and skills to keep an active life. Try to spread out your strength training through the week. Strength training can include lifting weights and doing body weight exercises such as squats.
- Balance training.** For older adults, doing balance training two or three times a week can help keep range of motion and lower the risk of falls.

Sit for less time. Getting up after sitting for a long time, such as sitting at the computer, can help control blood sugar levels. Take a few minutes to stand, walk around or do some light activity every 30 minutes.

Plants in your diet give you vitamins, minerals and carbohydrates. Carbohydrates include sugars and starches — the energy sources for your body — and fiber. Dietary fiber, also called roughage or bulk, is the part of plant foods your body can't digest or absorb.

Fiber-rich foods promote weight loss and lower the risk of diabetes. Eat a variety of healthy, fiber-rich foods, which include:

- Fruits, such as tomatoes, peppers and fruit from trees.
- Nonstarchy vegetables, such as leafy greens, broccoli and cauliflower.
- Legumes, such as beans, chickpeas and lentils.
- Whole grains, such as whole-wheat pasta and bread, whole-grain rice, whole oats, and quinoa.

Fiber benefits include:

- Slowing the absorption of sugars and lowering blood sugar levels.
- Interfering with the absorption of dietary fat and cholesterol.
- Managing other risk factors that affect heart health, such as blood pressure and inflammation.
- Helping you eat less because fiber-rich foods are more filling and energy rich.

Avoid carbohydrates that are high in sugar with little fiber or nutrients. For example, avoid white bread and pastries, pasta from white flour, fruit juices, and processed foods with sugar or high-fructose corn syrup.

Avoid eating many fatty foods that are high in calories. To help lose and manage weight, your diet should include a variety of foods with unsaturated fats. These are sometimes called healthy fats. Unsaturated fats — both monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats — promote healthy

blood cholesterol levels and good heart and vascular health. Healthy fat sources include: Olive, sunflower, safflower, cottonseed and canola oils. Avocados. Nuts and seeds, such as almonds, peanuts, flaxseed and pumpkin seeds. Fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna and cod.

Saturated fats are found in dairy products and meats. These should be a small part of your diet. You can limit saturated fats by eating low-fat dairy products and lean chicken and pork. Many fad diets — such as the glycemic index, paleo or keto diets — may help you lose weight. But there is little research about the long-term benefits of these diets or how they help prevent diabetes. Your goal for your diet should be to lose weight and then keep a healthier weight moving forward. So healthy decisions about your diet need to include a plan that you can keep as a lifelong habit. Making healthy decisions that reflect some of the foods you like and your traditions may be helpful for you over time. One simple way to help you make healthy food choices and eat appropriate portion sizes is to divide up your plate. For example, aim for your plate to include these portions: One-half: fruit and nonstarchy vegetables. One-quarter: whole grains. One-quarter: protein-rich foods, such as legumes, fish or lean meats. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends routine screening with tests to diagnose type 2 diabetes for all adults age 35 and older. The ADA also recommends screening for the following groups: People younger than 35 who carry excess weight and have one or more risk factors associated with diabetes. Women who have had gestational diabetes. People who have prediabetes.