

Complications of Diabetes

Long-term complications of diabetes develop gradually. The longer you have diabetes — and the less controlled your blood sugar — the higher the risk of complications. Eventually, diabetes complications may be disabling or even life-threatening. Possible complications include:

- **Cardiovascular disease.** Diabetes dramatically increases the risk of various cardiovascular problems, including coronary artery disease with chest pain (angina), heart attack, stroke and narrowing of arteries (atherosclerosis). If you have diabetes, you are more likely to have heart disease or stroke.
- **Nerve damage (neuropathy).** Excess sugar can injure the walls of the tiny blood vessels (capillaries) that nourish your nerves, especially in your legs. This can cause tingling, numbness, burning or pain that usually begins at the tips of the toes or fingers and gradually spreads upward. Left untreated, you could lose all sense of feeling in the affected limbs. Damage to the nerves related to digestion can cause problems with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation. For men, it may lead to erectile dysfunction.
- **Kidney damage (nephropathy).** The kidneys contain millions of tiny blood vessel clusters (glomeruli) that filter waste from your blood. Diabetes can damage this delicate filtering system. Severe damage can lead to kidney failure or irreversible end-stage kidney disease, which may require dialysis or a kidney transplant.
- **Eye damage (retinopathy).** Diabetes can damage the blood vessels of the retina (diabetic retinopathy), potentially leading to blindness. Diabetes also increases the risk of other serious vision conditions, such as cataracts and glaucoma.
- **Foot damage.** Nerve damage in the feet or poor blood flow to the feet increases the risk of various foot complications. Left untreated, cuts and blisters can develop serious infections, which often heal poorly. These infections may ultimately require toe, foot or leg amputation.
- **Skin conditions.** Diabetes may leave you more susceptible to skin problems, including bacterial and fungal infections.
- **Hearing impairment.** Hearing problems are more common in people with diabetes.
- **Alzheimer's disease.** Type 2 diabetes may increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease. The poorer your blood sugar control, the greater the risk appears to be. Although there are theories as to how these disorders might be connected, none has yet been proved.