

What Is Diabetes?

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Diabetes is a disorder that affects the way the body uses food for energy. Normally the body digests sugar into a simpler form of sugar called glucose. The glucose then circulates in the blood and waits to be used by the cells as fuel. Insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas, helps move glucose into the body's cells. A healthy pancreas adjusts the amount of insulin it produces to meet the needs of the body. Diabetes occurs when the pancreas does not make enough of the hormone insulin, or when the insulin that is produced does not work effectively. If left untreated, diabetes can severely damage organs in the body.

Two Types of Diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2

Type 1 Diabetes: Cells in the pancreas that make insulin have been destroyed. Therefore, the body is unable to produce its own insulin. Type 1 diabetes most often occurs before age 30, but may strike at any age. Frequent injections of synthetic insulin are required for people with Type 1 diabetes to control the level of sugar in their bloodstream.

Type 2 Diabetes: The body is able to produce insulin, but cells in the body do not respond to the insulin. This is called insulin resistance. The body responds to this situation by making even more insulin. The over-production of insulin exhausts the insulin-manufacturing cells in the pancreas. The insulin that is available within the body may be abnormal and therefore does not work properly. Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in adults over 35 but may occur at any age, even in children. Type 2 diabetes occurs most often because it is a "lifestyle" disease caused by obesity, lack of exercise, increased age and, to some degree, genetic disposition.

Less common causes of diabetes include:

Certain medicines

Pregnancy (which is called "gestational diabetes")

Any illness or disease that damages the pancreas and affects its ability to produce insulin (for example, pancreatitis)

What doesn't cause diabetes?

It is important to also be aware of the different myths that over the years have arisen about the causes of diabetes. Eating sweets or the wrong kind of food does not cause diabetes. However, eating these foods may cause obesity, which is associated with people developing Type 2 diabetes.

Stress does not cause diabetes but it does make the symptoms worse for those who already have the disease.

Diabetes is not contagious. Someone with diabetes cannot pass it on to anyone else.

For more information see the following websites: