

Diabetes the Deadly Disease
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If diabetes is not well controlled and good healthy habits are not maintained, serious health conditions, including blindness, severe kidney disease, stroke, heart attack, sores in your feet, or gangrene (dead infected tissue) could result in renal failure, blindness, amputations and/or death. These risks can be lowered by working with your doctor to maintain good control of your glucose levels by following a strict diet and taking medication as necessary, while increasing exercise and losing weight. Smoking exacerbates the progression of the disease process resulting in an earlier onset of symptoms of diabetic related diseases and death.

Diabetes is a disease characterized by high blood glucose levels (hyperglycemia), due to an absence or insufficient production or excretion of insulin. Insulin is the hormone responsible for keeping the blood glucose levels “normal”. When the blood glucose elevates (for example, after eating food), insulin is released from the pancreas to normalize the glucose level by increasing the uptake of glucose into body cells. In patients with diabetes, the absence, insufficient production of, or lack of response to insulin results in hyperglycemia.

There are different types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes** (previously called “juvenile diabetes”) which is an autoimmune disorder, in which the insulin producing beta cells found in the pancreas are destroyed by the body’s immune system. This means that the immune system, starts to attack its own body resulting in the pancreas not being able to produce insulin, the hormone that allows glucose to enter and fuel the cells. In order to survive, individuals with type 1 diabetes must take insulin every day.

- **Type 2 diabetes** (previously called “adult onset diabetes”) is the most common type of diabetes, accounting for 90-95% of all diabetes. In type 2 diabetes, the body does not produce enough insulin and/or the body’s cells become resistant to insulin. While there is a strong genetic component to developing this form of diabetes, there are other risk

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factors - the most significant of which is obesity. There is a direct relationship between the degree of obesity and the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, and this holds true in children as well as adults. It is estimated that the chance to develop diabetes doubles for every 20% increase over desirable body weight. Although many of these patients are on insulin or glucose lowering tablets, with weight loss and good diet modifications, some patients are able to come off medication completely. This needs to be guided and closely monitored by your doctor with the assistance of a dietician.

- **Gestational diabetes** occurs in some women who have high blood glucose levels during pregnancy but have never had diabetes. It affects about 4% of all pregnant women and they have an increased risk (20-50% chance) of developing type 2 diabetes in the following five to ten years.
- **Prediabetes** is a condition that occurs when a person's blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes. Following a strict diet and possibly losing weight while increasing exercise may prevent prediabetes from converting to diabetes.

Diabetes is linked to several vascular diseases:

- Retinopathy, which is an abnormal growth of blood vessels in your retina which could lead to blindness
- Nephropathy, a disease that damages the tiny filtering units of the kidney which may lead to kidney failure
- Neuropathy, a condition causing a loss of sensation in the feet and toes which may result to increased sores, infection, burns and gangrene of your toes and feet
- Atherosclerosis which may result in heart problems or inability to walk far without pain in your calves (claudication)
- Stroke, exhibited by the sudden onset of: numbness or weakness in the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body; confusion, trouble speaking, or difficulty understanding speech. Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes and or sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance, or lack of coordination.



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- Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD) which causes blockages in your blood vessels and may lead to gangrene and amputation.

Diabetes can truly be the deadly disease. Please consult your doctor if you have any initial signs which include:

- Excessive thirst and hunger.
- Frequent urination (from urinary tract infections or kidney problems)
- Weight loss or gain
- Fatigue or irritability.
- Abdominal pain and or nausea
- Blurred vision, tingling, pain or numbness in your hand and or feet and
- Slow-healing wounds.

Should you be diagnosed with diabetes, remember that maintaining good control of your diabetes and working together with your doctor and dietician can make a huge difference.