



Life is sweet.

DIABETES

About 18 million Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes according to the American Diabetes Association. You can help lower your risk of developing this lifelong condition with a good diet, exercise, and certain lifestyle changes. And if you have diabetes, taking these steps along with medication can help you manage it.

> What is diabetes?

Diabetes results when your body either can't produce or can't properly use insulin, a hormone that lets your body process and store glucose (blood sugar). When you have diabetes, glucose stays in your blood instead of being converted into energy by your body's cells. Over time, the excess sugar in your blood can cause potentially serious health complications.

In **type 1 diabetes**, your body isn't able to make insulin. You can develop type 1 diabetes at any age, but it usually starts during childhood or the early teen years.

In **type 2 diabetes**, the body does produce insulin, but either can't use it properly or doesn't make enough. Type 2 diabetes is the most common and the risk of developing it increases with age. African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans also have a higher risk. Lately, due in part to the rise in obesity in our country, more children are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

Gestational diabetes sometimes develops during pregnancy. If left untreated, it can lead to your baby being at risk for obesity as a child and having an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes as an adult.

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DIABETES

> How can you lower your risk?

- **Enjoy a healthy, balanced diet.** If you're overweight or obese, you have a higher risk of developing diabetes. To help prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes, eat healthy foods like grains, beans, vegetables, fruits, and both dairy products and meats that are low in fat. Avoid overly processed and fried foods that are high in fat, sugar, and sodium, as well as drinks with a lot of added sugar.
- **Activate your life.** Just 30 minutes of exercise a day can help reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes. You could take a brisk walk around your neighborhood, ride a bike, or swim some laps. Activities like these can also help you keep your weight down, strengthen your heart, and reduce your stress level.
- **Don't smoke.** According to the American Diabetes Association, smoking can increase your cholesterol and raise the levels of certain fats in your blood. People with diabetes who smoke are more likely to have nerve damage and kidney disease, and are three times more likely to die of heart disease than nonsmokers with diabetes. Smoking can also raise your blood sugar level, making it harder to manage diabetes if you have it.

> What symptoms might you notice?

Diabetes often goes undiagnosed. Many people don't have symptoms or may think the symptoms they do have are harmless. Early detection and treatment can decrease your chances of developing diabetes-related complications. Talk to your doctor if you are at high risk for diabetes based on such factors as your family history, weight, or ethnicity. Also talk to your doctor if one or more of the following symptoms apply to you:

- Have blurry vision.
- Need to urinate more often.
- Feel very tired or irritable.
- Feel extremely thirsty, or need to drink more often.
- Feel unusually hungry, or need to eat more often.
- Have lost weight quickly and for no apparent reason.

> To learn more

For more information about lowering your risk and managing diabetes, visit kp.org/diabetes.

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