



Diabetes:

What do I need to know?

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disorder characterized by higher than normal blood sugar levels.

Type 1 diabetes is caused by total failure of the pancreas to produce insulin, a hormone that is necessary in order to guide blood sugar into the body's cells where it is used for energy production. All type 1 diabetics require insulin in order to survive.

Type 2 diabetes is caused by resistance to the action of insulin so that blood sugar is unable to enter the body's cells. Early in the course of the disease the pancreas responds by increasing insulin production. Eventually this effort fails and insulin production decreases. Type 2 diabetes can be treated with oral medications and insulin, if necessary.

Complications of both types include stroke, heart attack, peripheral vascular disease, blindness, kidney failure and neuropathy.

Diabetes: Symptoms

Symptoms of diabetes can be acute (more common with type 1) and include:

- Increase in thirst
- Excessive urination
- Weight loss

Symptoms of type 2 diabetes are subtle, such as:

- Blurred vision
- Slow-healing wounds
- Frequent infections

Diabetes: Risk Factors

These factors can increase your risk of developing the disease:

- Overweight
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Abdominal fat (waist greater than 40 inches)
- Family history of diabetes
- Age (risk increases as you get older)
- History of diabetes in pregnancy
- Race (African American, Hispanic, Native American and Asian Americans are more likely to develop the disease)

You can lower your risk by being active, not smoking, making healthy food choices, keeping your blood pressure and cholesterol within normal limits and getting any recommended screenings and early treatment to prevent complications.

Be sure to contact your physician if you begin to notice any symptoms.

