



Patient education: Type 2 diabetes (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes (sometimes called type 2 "diabetes mellitus") is a disorder that disrupts the way your body uses sugar.

All the cells in your body need sugar to work normally. Sugar gets into the cells with the help of a hormone called insulin. If there is not enough insulin, or if the body stops responding to insulin, sugar builds up in the blood. That is what happens to people with diabetes.

There are 2 different types of diabetes. In type 1 diabetes, the problem is that the body makes little or no insulin. In type 2 diabetes, the problem is that:

- The body's cells do not respond to insulin
 - The body does not make enough insulin
 - Or both
-

What are the symptoms of type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes usually causes no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they include:

- Needing to urinate often
 - Intense thirst
 - Blurry vision
-

If type 2 diabetes rarely causes symptoms, why should I care about it?

Even though type 2 diabetes might not make you feel sick, it can cause serious problems over time, if it is not treated. The disorder can lead to:

- Heart attacks
 - Strokes
 - Kidney disease
 - Vision problems (or even blindness)
 - Pain or loss of feeling in the hands and feet
 - The need to have fingers, toes, or other body parts removed (amputated)
-

How do I know if I have type 2 diabetes?

To find out if you have type 2 diabetes, your doctor or nurse can do a blood test to measure the amount of sugar in your blood.

How is type 2 diabetes treated?

There are a few medicines that help control blood sugar. Some people need to take pills that help the body make more insulin or that help insulin do its job. Others need insulin shots.

Depending on what medicines you take, you might need to check your blood sugar regularly at home. But not everyone with type 2 diabetes needs to do this. Your doctor or nurse will tell you if you should be checking your blood sugar, and when and how to do this.

Sometimes, people with type 2 diabetes also need medicines to reduce the problems caused by the disease. For instance, medicines used to lower blood pressure can reduce the chances of a heart attack or stroke.

Medicines are not the only tool to manage diabetes. Being active, losing weight, eating right, and not smoking can all help people with diabetes stay as healthy as possible. It's also important to get the flu vaccine every year. Some people also need a vaccine to prevent pneumonia, too.

Can type 2 diabetes be prevented?

Yes, it can. To reduce your chances of getting type 2 diabetes, the most important thing you can do is control your weight. If you already have the disorder, losing weight can improve your health and blood sugar control. Being active can also help prevent or control the disorder.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Treatment for type 2 diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 1 diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: The ABCs of diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Hemoglobin A1C tests \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Diabetes and diet \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Chronic kidney disease \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Nerve damage caused by diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Diabetic retinopathy \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Care during pregnancy for women with type 1 or type 2 diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Low blood sugar in people with diabetes \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Hyperosmolar nonketotic coma \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Diabetes and infections \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes: Overview \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes: Treatment \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes: Insulin treatment \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes: Alcohol, exercise, and medical care \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Self-monitoring of blood sugar in diabetes \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Type 2 diabetes and diet \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Preventing complications from diabetes \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Diabetic neuropathy \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Foot care for people with diabetes \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Metabolic syndrome \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Mar 27, 2021.

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2021 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Topic 15402 Version 12.0

→