



# What You Need to Know to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is the most common type of diabetes today. The good news is that there are ways to prevent diabetes. Read on to learn the basics about diabetes and how to lower your risk.

## What is Type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes is a disease that occurs when the body cannot manage blood glucose well. When we eat, carbohydrate in food is digested and turned into sugar or glucose. Glucose then gets absorbed into our blood. The glucose goes from our blood into our cells with help from a hormone called insulin (insulin is made in the pancreas). We then use the glucose in our cells for energy. If you have diabetes, your body cannot move glucose from your blood into your cells well.

This may happen because:

- your pancreas cannot make any insulin or enough insulin
- your cells stop the insulin and glucose cannot enter your cells

When glucose cannot go into your cells, it stays in the blood causing high blood glucose levels or “high blood sugar.”

## Am I at risk for Type 2 diabetes?

You are at higher risk for diabetes if you:

- Are a member of a high risk ethnic group (including being Aboriginal, Hispanic, South Asian, Asian or African)
- Are 40 or older
- Are overweight or obese, especially around the belly area
- Have family members with diabetes
- Have been diagnosed with [prediabetes](#) (also known as impaired glucose tolerance or impaired fasting glucose)
- Have low physical activity
- Have high blood pressure



- Have high cholesterol or high triglycerides
- Have a mental health condition (like depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia)
- Have been prescribed certain medications (like anti-inflammatory steroids or medications to treat certain mental health conditions)
- Have sleep apnea (a sleep disorder)
- Have heart disease
- Have certain kidney, nerve or eye conditions
- Have HIV

If you are a women, you may be at higher risk of diabetes if you:

- Had diabetes while pregnant (gestational diabetes) or gave birth to a baby over 4 kg (9 lbs)
- Have been diagnosed with [polycystic ovary syndrome](#)

Talk about these risk factors with your health care provider.

## What can I do to prevent diabetes?

### Make healthy food choices to help prevent diabetes

Learning about healthy eating and diabetes will take some time. The good news is there is a lot of support and information available. Registered Dietitians who work in [Diabetes Education Programs](#) can give you trusted nutrition advice tailored to your needs. Need healthy meal and snack ideas? Try out our [Diabetes Menu Plan](#). Do you enjoy ethnic foods? Print one of these [Healthy Diabetes Recipe Booklets](#) designed for South Asian, Chinese, Caribbean or Latin American tastes.

### Be active to help prevent diabetes

Try to be active for at least 150 minutes/week. That's about 30 minutes/day on five days of the week. You can start with 10 minutes at a time. Make sure to do both resistance exercise (like lifting weights) and aerobic exercise (like walking, swimming or playing sports). Choose activities that you enjoy and can do with your family. If you are new to physical activity, speak to your health care provider before getting started. For more tips read [Physical Activity and Diabetes](#).



## What can I do to prevent diabetes?

### Manage your weight to help prevent diabetes

If you are overweight or obese, losing even 5 percent of your body weight can help prevent pre-diabetes from developing into diabetes. [See tips on losing weight in a healthy way.](#)

### Take your medications to help prevent diabetes

If you need medication to control cholesterol, blood pressure or other conditions, take them as prescribed.

## Is diabetes serious?

**Yes.** If diabetes is not managed well, high blood glucose can lead to other health conditions like:

Heart disease    Kidney disease    Eye disease    Nerve damage

## Should I get screened for diabetes?

If you are over 40 years old and have some of the risk factors above, speak to your doctor about being screened for diabetes. Screening includes a simple blood test to see how much glucose is in your blood.

You can also take the [Canadian Diabetes Risk Questionnaire](#) (CANRISK) and talk to your health care provider about the results.

## Bottom line

Diabetes is a serious condition, but it can be prevented. Eating a balanced, nutritious diet and being physically active are two things you can do to help prevent diabetes. If you have questions about healthy eating and diabetes speak with your health care provider.