



Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes Information for WellCare Members

What is Type 1 Diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes is a disease that starts when the pancreas stops making insulin. Insulin lets blood sugar—also called glucose—enter the body's cells to be used for energy. Without insulin, the cells can't get the sugar they need, and too much sugar builds up in the blood. Diabetes can cause sudden or long-term problems. If the body doesn't have enough insulin and blood sugar gets very high, a sudden and very serious problem called diabetic ketoacidosis can happen. This is a sudden and very serious problem and it can be deadly. Over time, high blood sugar can damage the eyes, heart, blood vessels, nerves, and kidneys. Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age, but it usually starts in children or young adults. That's why it used to be called juvenile diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of the illness. Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes are different. In type 1, the body stops making insulin. In type 2, the body does not make enough insulin, or the body can't use insulin the right way. All people with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin. Some people with type 2 diabetes also need insulin, but most people can use diet, exercise, and medicine in pills to treat that illness. There isn't a cure for type 1 diabetes. But with treatment, people with Type 1 diabetes can live long and healthy lives.

What Causes Type 1 Diabetes?

The body makes insulin in beta cells, which are in a part of the pancreas called the islet ("EYE-let") tissue. Type 1 diabetes starts because the body destroys the beta cells. Experts don't know why this happens. Some people have a greater chance of getting type 1 diabetes, because they have a parent, brother, or sister who has it. But most people with the illness don't have a family history of it. Other things that increase the risk of getting type 1 diabetes are being white and having islet cell antibodies in the blood.

What are the Symptoms of Type 1 Diabetes?

Symptoms of Type 1 diabetes are:

- Being very thirsty.
- Urinating a lot.
- Losing weight without trying.
- Being hungrier than usual (sometimes).

These symptoms usually appear over a few days or weeks. Sometimes people notice symptoms after an illness, such as the flu. They may think that the diabetes symptoms are because of the flu, so they don't seek medical care soon enough.

If a person waits too long to get medical care, he or she may get symptoms of diabetic ketoacidosis. Symptoms of this problem include:

- Flushed, hot, dry skin.
- Not feeling hungry.
- Belly pain.
- Vomiting.
- A strong, fruity breath odor (similar to nail polish remover).
- Fast and shallow breathing.
- Restlessness, drowsiness, or trouble waking up.
- Confusion.

How is Type 1 Diabetes Diagnosed?

A doctor asks questions about the person's health and does a physical exam. A blood test measures the person's glucose. Some people are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes because they have symptoms of diabetic ketoacidosis.

How is it Treated?

Treatment for type 1 diabetes focuses on keeping blood sugar levels as close to the normal range as possible. A person with type 1 diabetes needs to:

- Take insulin through daily shots or an insulin pump.
- Eat a healthy diet that includes carbohydrate throughout the day.
- Check blood sugar levels several times a day.
- Get regular exercise.

When a small child has diabetes, the parents have the responsibility for blood sugar control. As the child grows, he or she can take over more of the diabetes care. Treatment may change over time based on the results of daily home blood sugar tests and other tests or exams.

Can Type 1 Diabetes Be Prevented?

There is no way to prevent type 1 diabetes. But studies are being done to find ways to prevent or delay diabetes in people who are most likely to get it. Tight control of blood sugar and blood pressure can help people with type 1 diabetes prevent or delay problems with their eyes, kidneys, heart, blood vessels, and nerves.

What is Type 2 Diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes is a lifelong disease that happens when the cells of your body can't use insulin the right way or when the pancreas can't make enough insulin. Insulin lets blood sugar—also called glucose—enter the body's cells to be used for energy. When insulin is not able to do its job, the cells can't get the sugar they need, and too much sugar builds up in the blood. Over time, this extra sugar in the blood can damage your eyes, heart, blood vessels, nerves, and kidneys.

More and more adults and children are getting type 2 diabetes. This is largely because of poor eating habits and a lack of physical activity. It is important to know if you or your children are at risk for type 2 diabetes and to know what you can do to help prevent the disease.

What Causes Type 2 Diabetes?

You can get type 2 diabetes if:

- Your body does not respond properly to insulin. This makes it hard for your cells to get sugar from the blood for energy. This is called insulin resistance.
- Your pancreas does not make enough insulin.

Your weight, how active you are, and your family history all affect the way your body responds to insulin. If you are overweight, get little or no exercise, or have family members with diabetes, you are at greater risk of getting type 2 diabetes.

What are the Symptoms?

Some people don't have symptoms, especially when diabetes is diagnosed early. This is because the blood sugar level may rise so slowly that a person may not know that anything is wrong. Other people may have symptoms, such as:

- Being very thirsty.
- Urinating a lot.
- Losing weight without trying.

- Having blurry vision.
- Feeling hungrier or more tired than usual.

Sometimes a person finds out that he or she has type 2 diabetes during a regular medical checkup. Or people may find out that they have the disease during an appointment for another health problem such as high blood pressure, an infection, or a wound that heals slowly. Some people don't find out that they have diabetes until they have a complication from the disease, such as vision problems, kidney disease, nerve disease, or heart and blood vessel problems.

How is Type 2 Diabetes Diagnosed?

If your doctor thinks that you have type 2 diabetes, he or she will ask you questions about your medical history, do a physical exam, and order a blood glucose test. A blood glucose test is a blood test that measures the amount of sugar in your blood. The test is usually done first thing in the morning, before you eat or drink anything.

How is it Treated?

The key to treating type 2 diabetes is controlling blood sugar levels. All of the following help to lower blood sugar:

- Eating healthy foods, such as foods lower in sugars or fats
- Losing weight, if you are overweight
- Getting regular exercise
- In some cases, taking medicines

Treatment for diabetes also includes checking blood sugar levels to make sure that the disease is under control. It is important to watch for signs of high and low blood sugar. Both can cause problems and need to be treated.

People with diabetes need regular checkups to make sure their treatment is working and that they do not get more serious health problems.

Can Type 2 Diabetes Be Prevented?

If you are at risk for type 2 diabetes or if you have prediabetes, you may prevent diabetes by getting regular exercise and paying attention to what and how much you eat. If you are overweight, losing a little weight (10 to 20 pounds) can go a long way toward preventing or delaying the disease.

References

Healthwise, Incorporated. Type 1 Diabetes. Author: Carline Rea, RN, BS, MS. Medical Review: Caroline S. Rhoads, MD (Internal Medicine), Stephen LaFranchi, MD (Pediatrics and Pediatric Endocrinology). November 21, 2006.

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