What is diabetes?

Human bodies, like engines, need fuel to work. One source of fuel we use is the glucose, or sugar, that comes from food.

The right amount of sugar helps cells work right so your body can throw a baseball or read a book.

A hormone called insulin makes sure the sugar balance in the body is right. It is made by the pancreas.

If the pancreas doesn’t make enough insulin, or the body can’t use the insulin well, the sugar level in the blood gets too high. This causes a disease called diabetes.

Is it serious?

It can be. Having diabetes puts people at higher risk for:
- Heart and blood vessel damage
- Kidney damage
- Eye damage, including blindness
- Nerve damage
- Loss of feet or limbs

People with diabetes can greatly lower these risks by keeping their blood sugar under control.

People with diabetes can lead normal lives and prevent serious problems if they get treatment. If diabetes isn’t treated, it can be life threatening.

There are 2 main types of diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is more common in children and people under age 30. But it can appear at any age.
- The pancreas of someone with Type 1 diabetes doesn’t make enough insulin.
- The person needs daily insulin shots.
- Type 1 is found in about 10% of people with diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes tends to happen in people over age 40 who are overweight and who have a family history of diabetes.
- The pancreas makes insulin, but the body can’t use it well.
- Changes to diet and activity levels can often control Type 2 diabetes. The person may need to take pills or insulin shots too.
- Type 2 is found in about 90% of people with diabetes.

This pamphlet is about Type 2 diabetes.

To Learn More
American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/healthyweight
**Am I at risk?**

You may be at risk if:
- You are overweight or have extra weight around your waist.
- You're active less than 3 times a week.
- You have a parent, grandparent, sister or brother with diabetes.
- You're over age 45.
- You're Hispanic, African American, Native American, Asian American or Pacific Islander.
- You had diabetes while pregnant.

**Health factors that can put you at risk:**
- Your blood pressure is over 140/90.
- Your HDL (good) cholesterol is under 50 if you're a woman or under 40 if you're a man.
- Your triglyceride level is 150 or higher.

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**What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of diabetes can be hard to notice. They may appear slowly over a long time.

**If you have symptoms, you may:**
- Need to urinate (pee) often.
- Be very thirsty.
- Feel tired.
- Have blurry vision.
- Lose weight.

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**How do I know if I have it?**

If you have any risk factors, talk with your health care provider about a blood test.
- The test measures your blood sugar levels the first thing in the morning before you eat.
- You may be tested again on another day to make sure the test is accurate.
- A blood sugar level of 100 or less means your blood sugar is normal.
- A blood sugar level of 100 to 124 means you have prediabetes. You can make healthy changes to prevent or delay getting diabetes.
- If your blood sugar measures over 125, you have diabetes.

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**What if I have diabetes?**

Having diabetes can seem scary. But many people with diabetes lead normal lives and avoid serious problems.

Learn as much as you can about how to keep your blood sugar under control.

**To manage your blood sugar you can:**
- Manage your weight.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Be active.
- Learn how to check your blood sugar at home. Keep a diary to show your provider.
- Get regular health care.

Things that keep your blood sugar on track can also improve your health in other ways. Many people who control their blood sugar feel better than they have for a long time.

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**What about pregnancy?**

Some women have high blood sugar levels during pregnancy. This is called gestational diabetes.
- Sugar levels need to be controlled to keep both mother and baby healthy.
- Often a woman's blood sugar levels return to normal after giving birth.
- But having gestational diabetes puts her at higher risk for getting Type 2 diabetes later.

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"My mother has diabetes, so I got tested. Now we help each other stay healthy."

"I was scared about having diabetes. But I learned how to manage my blood sugar and now I feel good most of the time."