

# Diabetes

## Care Provider Bulletin

May 2019



## Who is at Increased Risk?

Those:

- Overweight
- Age 45 and older (Type 2)
- Living an inactive lifestyle
- With a family history of diabetes
- Whose ancestry is African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American/ Pacific Islander
- With high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Whom experienced gestational diabetes during pregnancy

## Did you Know?

- Diabetes Mellitus is a condition that affects the way the body processes glucose (often called just sugar) – it is our main source of energy. Insulin is a hormone that is required for most cells in the body to absorb glucose and convert it to energy. Low levels or inefficient insulin production causes many cells in the body to become starved for energy while the body's blood glucose (sugar) levels to rise above normal levels. This causes inefficient cell activity and multiple other complications from concentrated glucose outside the cells. Over time, the eyes, kidneys, nerves, or heart can be affected.
- Different types of diabetes:
  - Type 1, requires a person to take insulin every day. It is usually first diagnosed in children and young adults.
  - Type 2 is the most common form, and develops when a person's body does not efficiently process insulin. This form often appears very slowly and can be brought on from poor diet.
- 1.5 million Americans are diagnosed with diabetes every year.
- Diabetes has no cure, but if managed well, people can live a healthy life.

## Preventing Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed with a healthy lifestyle. You can support the persons under your care by helping them:

- Eat a healthy diet
  - Eat different types of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
  - Avoid foods high in fatty calories
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes, five days per week
  - Brainstorm activities they like – make exercise fun and not a chore
  - Take walks, go swimming, look into seated exercise options, etc. If you are not sure, ask the person's doctor.
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Receive regular doctor checkups

## What are the symptoms of diabetes at onset, or if not well-managed?

### Common symptoms:

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Change in weight
- Fatigue
- Confusion or Coma
- Increased hunger
- Blurred vision

### Symptoms that develop over time:

- Slow-healing sores or frequent infections
- Loss of sensation and/or tingling in the hands or feet
- Burning pain in arms, legs, or feet
- Swollen, tender gums
- Areas of skin darkening



## Preventing Complications of Diabetes

People with diabetes are at higher risk of certain problems. Learn what to watch for and help the person you support get help when they need it. If you think any of the following problems are starting, help the person report it to their doctor.

- Heart or kidney disease and stroke
  - Smoking increases the chances for these problems. Help the person you support learn options to quit.
  - Manage acceptable blood glucose levels – ask the person’s doctor how they should measure their numbers? What range is acceptable? Ask what to do if their levels are high or low?
  - Manage blood pressure – ask the person’s doctor what their blood pressure should be at and what to do if it goes above or below that number?
  - Manage cholesterol with diet and medications – this is tested at regular doctor exams.
- Low blood glucose (see below)
- Weight gain can increase the likelihood of other problems. Reduce weight through a better diet and exercise (talk to doctor for recommendations).
- Nerve damage (neuropathy)
  - Numbness of the feet, legs, and hands is common and can make it difficult to feel pain, heat, or cold.
  - Damage to the nerves that control internal organs can lead to problems with digestion, eyes, blood pressure, and others. If any of these problems occur, report it to the person’s doctor. They may need to see a specialist.

## Symptoms of a diabetic emergency:

- People have different symptoms of high or low blood sugar, depending on their body. Their doctor can give you guidelines. Learn what to watch for and report changes.
- High blood sugar can be life-threatening. If it goes too high, you must get immediate medical help. Talk to the person’s doctor about what is too high or too low for their body. The doctor should give you levels to maintain. Record the person’s blood sugar levels when tested so you recognize a change.
- If a person is experiencing extremely high or low blood-sugar symptoms, especially confusion, call 911.

### High blood sugar (hyperglycemia) symptoms:

- High blood glucose when tested
- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Stomach pain
- Breath smells “fruity”
- Very dry mouth
- Rapid heartbeat
- Infections that worsen

### Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) symptoms:

- Low blood glucose when tested
- Shaky or nervousness
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Sweating
- Hunger
- Nausea
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Difficulty speaking
- Confusion

### Have a plan in place

- Talk to the person’s doctor and develop a plan that is right for them. Ask the doctor what to document, and when to call.
- If different care providers work with the person, they should all be trained what to document and watch for.
- Ask if any new technology such as glucose monitors, phone or mobile device apps or other training materials would help.

## Living with Diabetes

Diabetes can be managed through:

- Healthy eating
- Regular exercise
- Diabetes medication or insulin therapy
- Blood sugar monitoring
- Home treatment and self-care
- Commitment to managing diabetes
- Yearly eye exams and physicals
- Wearing diabetes identification (e.g. medical identification bracelet)
- Being up-to-date on immunizations
- Good oral health (brushing teeth, flossing, regular dental checkups)
- Keeping cholesterol and blood pressure under control
- Avoiding smoking
- Limiting consumption of alcohol

**If the person you support is exhibiting symptoms that are not normal for them, call 911. You could help save a life.**

## Sources:

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, <http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov>

American Diabetes Association, [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

Mayo Clinic, Diabetic Coma: [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diabetic-coma/symptoms-causes/syc-20371475](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diabetic-coma/symptoms-causes/syc-20371475)

Statistics about Diabetes, American Diabetes Association: [www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/statistics/?loc=db-slabnav](http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/statistics/?loc=db-slabnav)