

Can Diabetes Be Prevented?

Diabetes (say: dye-uh-BEE-tees) is a health problem that affects kids of all ages, but you can't catch it like a cold. In some cases, diabetes can be prevented. How? Let's find out.

What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that affects how the body uses **glucose** (say: GLOO-kose), a sugar that is the body's main source of fuel. Your body needs glucose to keep running.

Here's how it should work:

1. You eat.
2. Glucose from the food gets into your bloodstream.
3. Your pancreas produces a hormone called **insulin** (say: IN-suh-lin).
4. Insulin helps the glucose get into the body's cells.
5. Your body gets the energy it needs.

The pancreas is a long, flat gland in your belly that helps your body digest food. It also makes insulin. Insulin is kind of like a key that opens the doors to the cells of the body. It lets the glucose in. Then the glucose can move out of the blood and into the cells.

But if someone has diabetes, the body either can't make insulin (this is called **type 1 diabetes**) or the insulin doesn't work in the body like it should (this is called **type 2 diabetes**). The glucose can't get into the cells normally, so the blood sugar level gets too high. Lots of sugar in the blood makes people sick if they don't get treatment.

Can Type 1 Diabetes Be Prevented?

Type 1 diabetes can't be prevented. Doctors can't even tell who will get it and who won't.

No one knows for sure why some kids get type 1 diabetes, but scientists think it has something to do with genes. Genes are like instructions for how the body should look and work that are passed on by parents to their kids. But just getting the genes for diabetes isn't usually enough. Most of the time, something else has to happen to the person — like getting an infection with a virus — for him or her to get type 1 diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes isn't contagious, so you can't catch it from another person or pass it along to your friends. And stuff like eating too much sugar doesn't cause type 1 diabetes.

Can Type 2 Diabetes Be Prevented?

Type 2 diabetes is different. Sometimes, it can be prevented. In type 2 diabetes, the pancreas can still make insulin, but the body doesn't respond to it in the right way.

Most people who have type 2 diabetes are overweight. In the past, mainly overweight adults got type 2 diabetes. Today, more kids have type 2 diabetes, probably because more kids are overweight.

How can you help prevent type 2 diabetes? Getting to a healthy weight is one way. That's because a lot of extra weight makes it harder for the body to use insulin properly. Making healthy food choices and getting enough exercise are other good steps to take to help prevent diabetes.

How Can I Protect Myself From Getting Type 2 Diabetes?

If you want to help prevent type 2 diabetes — or just be healthier in lots of other ways — take these steps:

- **Eat good-for-you foods.** Try to eat foods that are low in fat, but high in other nutrients. Here are some good choices: whole-grain cereals and breads, fruits, vegetables, milk, yogurt, cheese, lean meats, and other sources of protein.
- **Limit fast food and sugary sodas.** Eating too much fat and sugar can make you overweight. And being overweight can make you more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. Try to cut back on fatty fast foods and sugary drinks like sodas, juices, and iced teas.
- **Get up and get moving.** Staying active is a better choice than watching TV or playing video or computer games when it comes to preventing diabetes and staying healthy. Moving around a lot helps prevent diabetes and helps keep your weight in a healthy range. Being active can be as simple as walking the dog, running around your yard, or playing soccer with friends. Try to do something that gets you moving every day!
- **If you have questions about your weight, ask.** If you're concerned about your weight, ask your mom or dad to take you to talk to your doctor. A doctor can help you find out if your weight is healthy and how to keep it (or get it) that way.

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