

Diabetes risk factors

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What are the risk factors for diabetes?

There are many risk factors for diabetes. It is important to look at your lifestyle and any underlying conditions you may have.

| Risk factors for type 1 diabetes ^{1,2} | |
|---|---|
| Family history | Your risk increases if a parent or sibling has type 1 diabetes. |
| Infection or diseases of the pancreas | Certain viral infections (eg, hepatitis B) and diseases of the pancreas (eg, the presence of damaging immune system cells (autoantibodies)) can cause inflammation and reduce the ability of the pancreas to produce insulin. |

| Risk factors for type 2 diabetes ^{1,2} | |
|---|---|
| Obesity or being overweight | Having more fats (abdominal fat, peripheral fat and visceral fat) in your body causes your cells to become resistant to insulin. |
| Insulin resistance | Your body cells start to become resistant to insulin, and your pancreas has to work extra hard to make enough insulin to meet your body's needs. |
| High blood pressure | A blood pressure of >140/90 mmHg is linked to an increased risk for diabetes. |
| High cholesterol | Low levels of high-density lipoprotein (good) cholesterol and high levels of low-density lipoprotein (bad) cholesterol is linked to an increased risk for diabetes. |
| Physical inactivity | Sedentary lifestyle and physical inactivity increase your risk for type 2 diabetes. In general, physical activity helps control your weight, uses up glucose as energy, and makes your cells more sensitive to insulin. |
| Family history | Your risk increases if a parent or sibling has type 2 diabetes. |
| Polycystic ovary syndrome | Women who have polycystic ovary syndrome—a common condition characterized by irregular menstrual periods and excess hair growth—have increased risk for diabetes. |
| Age | Your risk increases as you get older (>45 years). |

| Risk factors for gestational diabetes ^{1,2} | |
|--|--|
| Age | Pregnant women >25 years are at increased risk for diabetes. |
| Obesity or being overweight | Your risk increases if you are obese or overweight prior to pregnancy. |
| Family or personal history | Your risk increases if a parent or sibling has type 1 or type 2 diabetes, or if you had gestational diabetes during your previous pregnancy. |

You can lower your chances of getting diabetes through healthy living, which refers to [dietary modification](#), [weight reduction](#), regular physical activity/[exercise](#) and [smoking cessation](#).



How can I tell if I have diabetes?

Most symptoms of diabetes are due to high levels of sugar in your blood. Type 1 and type 2 diabetes share some common and distinct symptoms.³



Common symptoms of type 1 and type 2 diabetes:

- Fatigue
- Increased hunger and thirst
- Frequent urination
- Dry mouth
- Itchy skin
- Blurred vision



Other symptoms of type 1 diabetes:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Nausea and vomiting



Other symptoms of type 2 diabetes:

- Yeast infections between fingers and toes, under breasts, in or around sex organs
- Slow-healing of sores or cuts
- Pain or numbness in legs or feet



Apart from type 1 and type 2 diabetes, some pregnant women may develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy.⁴ Gestational diabetes is usually short term and asymptomatic, but you may share similar symptoms of type 1 and type 2 diabetes mentioned above.

When to screen for diabetes?

If you have any of the diabetes symptoms, it is important that you talk to your doctor immediately for a diabetes screening test. If your test results are negative, your doctor may recommend having follow-up screening tests every 3 years.⁵ If your test results are positive, your doctor should refer you for diabetes care and treatment.



What is the link between smoking and diabetes?

Smokers and second-hand smokers are more likely (30–40%) to develop type 2 diabetes than non-smokers.⁶ They tend to have problems controlling their diabetic condition and adjusting the insulin dosing. If you have diabetes and you smoke, you are more likely to have serious health complications than people with diabetes who do not smoke. It is highly beneficial to [quit smoking](#) to improve your general health.



References

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