

Understanding Diabetes

At least 20.8 million people have diabetes in the United States, but nearly one-third of those with diabetes don't know that they have it.* *The Journal of the American Medical Association* predicts that between 2000 and 2050, the number of people in the United States diagnosed with diabetes will increase by 165 percent.

What Is Diabetes?

"Our bodies turn most of the food we eat into glucose, or sugar, which is needed for energy," explains Irfan Ali, M.D., of Lake Jovita Internal Medicine. "Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that is used to help glucose get to the body's cells. Diabetes occurs when the body either doesn't make enough insulin (type 1 diabetes) or can't use its own insulin properly, causing sugars to build up in the blood (type 2 diabetes)."

Type 1 diabetes usually strikes children and young adults, but disease onset can occur at any age. **Type 2 diabetes** is the most prevalent form of the disease, making up 90 to 95 percent of all diagnosed diabetes cases. "While it's more common among adults, type 2 diabetes increasingly is being diagnosed in children and adolescents, due in large part to an epidemic of childhood obesity," Dr. Ali says. "The disease usually begins as insulin resistance, a disorder in which the cells do not use insulin properly. The pancreas

gradually loses its ability to produce insulin as the body's need for insulin increases. Damage occurs slowly, often without signs. People may not know they have the disease until a serious health problem occurs."

Treatment Is Key

Although there is no cure for diabetes, early detection and treatment can help control the disease and prevent complications. Potential complications include heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, blindness, kidney disease, nervous system disorders, dental disease and amputations.

Treatment involves a combination of lifestyle, medical and psychosocial issues. The goal of treatment is to keep blood glucose near normal levels at all times. This requires a regimen that may include a carefully managed diet, exercise, home blood glucose testing, oral medication and/or insulin injections.

Preventive Measures Can Help

While there are no known methods for preventing type 1 diabetes, research has found that lifestyle changes such as consuming a healthy diet and getting adequate physical activity may help prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes.

* Source: American Diabetes Association, www.diabetes.org.

Symptoms of Diabetes

- Frequent urination.
- Excessive thirst.
- Extreme hunger.
- Increased fatigue.
- Unusual weight loss.
- Sudden vision changes.
- Sores that are slow to heal.
- More infections than usual.
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet.