

Managing Diabetes: It's Not Easy, But It's Worth It

By the National Diabetes Education Program

If you have diabetes, you know the day-to-day steps needed to manage diabetes can be hard. Diabetes can lead to serious health problems, such as blindness, loss of limb, kidney failure, heart disease and early death. Managing diabetes can be easier if you set goals and make a plan.

A1C Below 7

People who keep their A1C below 7 in the early years after they are diagnosed with diabetes have fewer problems with their eyes, nerves and kidneys and have fewer heart attacks later in life. Your A1C measures your blood glucose (blood sugar) over time.

Most people, especially those who have just been diagnosed, should aim for an A1C of less than 7. If you have had diabetes for a long time, have other health problems or have problems with low blood sugar, your A1C target may be higher than 7. Talk with your health care team about your blood glucose targets. Yours may be different from others.

Diabetes management is not just about your blood glucose. Keeping your blood pressure and cholesterol under control can lower your risk for heart attack and stroke as well as other diabetes problems. Take your medicines that work to control blood pressure and cholesterol. Talk with your health care team about taking control of your blood pressure and cholesterol.

Managing diabetes isn't easy, but it's worth it. The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) offers tips to help.

Set a Goal

The first step is to set a goal for yourself. Choose something that is important to you and you believe you can do. Then make a plan by choosing the small steps you will take.

For example, start working toward getting 30 minutes of physical activity, such as brisk walking, most days of the week. If you have not been very active in the past, start slowly and try adding a few minutes each day. Ask others for help with your plan.

NDEP has free resources that can help. For more information on managing

diabetes, order a free copy of 4 Steps to Control Your Diabetes. For Life from the National Diabetes Education Program at www.YourDiabetesInfo.org or call 888-693-NDEP (6337); TTY: 866-569-1162.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Diabetes Education Program is jointly sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with the support of more than 200 partner organizations.

NDEP's Control Your Diabetes. For Life. campaign seeks to reach the nearly 24 million Americans with diabetes and their families with messages about the seriousness of diabetes, ways to control the disease and the benefits of controlling diabetes for life.

Facts About Diabetes: America's Seventh Leading Cause of Death*

What is diabetes?*

Diabetes is a group of diseases marked by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action or both. Diabetes can lead to serious complications and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to manage the disease and lower the risk of complications.

How many Americans have diabetes and pre-diabetes?*

- 23.6 million Americans have diabetes – 7.8 percent of the U.S. population. Of these, 5.7 million do not know they have the disease.
- Each year, about 1.6 million people age 20 or older are diagnosed with diabetes.
- The number of people diagnosed with diabetes has risen from 1.5 million in 1958 to 17.9 million in 2007, an increase of epidemic proportions.
- It is estimated that 57 million adults age 20 and older have pre-diabetes. Pre-diabetes is a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be called diabetes. Studies have shown that by losing weight and increasing physical activity, people can prevent or delay pre-diabetes from progressing to diabetes.

What is the prevalence of diabetes by type?

- Type 1 (previously called insulin-dependent or juvenile-onset) diabetes accounts for 5 percent to 10 percent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes.
- Type 2 (previously called non-insulin-dependent or adult-onset) diabetes accounts for 90 percent to 95 percent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is increasingly being diagnosed in children and adolescents.

What is the prevalence of diabetes by race/ethnicity?*

American Indians and Alaska Natives

- About 16.5 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives age 20 years and older who are served by the Indian Health Service have diagnosed diabetes.
- Diabetes rates vary – from Alaska Native adults at 6.0 percent to American Indians in southern Arizona at 29.3 percent.

Non-Hispanic Whites

- 14.9 million; 9.8 percent of all non-Hispanic whites age 20 and older have diagnosed and undiagnosed diabetes.

African Americans

- 3.7 million; 14.7 percent of all non-Hispanic blacks age 20 and older have diagnosed and undiagnosed diabetes.
- Non-Hispanic blacks are about 1.8 times more likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites age 20 and older.

Hispanics/Latinos

- 10.4 percent of Hispanics/Latinos age 20 or older have diagnosed diabetes.
- Among Hispanics/Latinos, diabetes prevalence rates are 8.2 percent for Cubans, 11.9 percent for Mexican Americans and 12.6 percent for Puerto Ricans.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

- The rate of diagnosed diabetes in Asian Americans is 7.5 percent. Prevalence data for diabetes among Pacific Islanders, however, is limited.

How many deaths are linked to diabetes?*

- Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death listed on U.S. death certificates.

- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death among people with diabetes – about 68 percent die of heart disease or stroke.
- The overall risk of death among people with diabetes is about double that of people without diabetes.

Treating Diabetes*

- Diabetes can lead to serious complications, such as blindness, kidney damage, cardiovascular disease and lower-limb amputations, but people with diabetes can lower the occurrence of these and other diabetes complications by controlling blood glucose, blood pressure and blood lipids.
- Many people with type 2 diabetes can manage their blood glucose by following a healthy meal plan and exercise program, losing excess weight and taking oral medication. Some people with type 2 diabetes also may need insulin to manage their blood glucose.

*The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. National Diabetes Statistics, 2007. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

** 10-Year Follow-up of Intensive Glucose Control in Type 2 Diabetes N Engl J Med 2008; 359 N Eng J Med 10.1056/NEJMoa0806470

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