(In)frequently Asked Questions About Diabetes

Learning you have a chronic disease, like diabetes, can be confusing and alarming. Whether you’ve been recently diagnosed or have been managing the disease for years, a new mindset and a new approach could improve your quality of life and overall health.

“Every person has a different reaction to the diagnosis. While some people simply ignore it, others worry it’s the end of their life,” said Dr. Rajesh Garg, an endocrinologist who serves as director of the University of Miami Health System’s Comprehensive Diabetes Center. Today, he addresses some common concerns that people with diabetes are often reluctant to discuss with their doctors.

Did I do something wrong? What caused me to get diabetes?

“People feel as if diabetes is their own fault. And many assume that physicians will blame them. In reality, diabetes is caused by a combination of environmental and genetic factors.”

Diets high in calories from processed foods, animal fats, and refined sugars can contribute to obesity and pre-diabetes. If caught early enough, pre-diabetes can be course-corrected before it advances into diabetes. Primary care physicians and dietitians can help patients learn how to turn a pre-diabetes diagnosis into healthy habits to last a lifetime.
If diabetes is beyond my control, why should I change my diet or lifestyle?

“Many complications of diabetes can be prevented, or their effect can be blunted with proper treatment and some changes to your diet and behavior.”

You can help yourself by taking your medications as prescribed, reducing your stress, and getting enough sleep. Eating a heart-healthy diet low in added sugars and saturated fats yet high in antioxidants, fiber, vitamins, and minerals can help manage your blood sugar and mood. Quit smoking and avoid alcohol. Maintain a healthy weight for your height and age.

While this disease isn’t entirely under your control, these lifestyle adjustments can help you feel better, maintain your energy throughout the day, and avoid diabetes-related health complications that could affect your eyes, kidneys, and limbs.

What about home remedies and diets to cure diabetes? Do they work?

“Please don’t be misled by information that you read online or hear from friends and family. Use your common sense, and before trying anything, talk to your healthcare
provider about its safety and effectiveness.”

I’m worried about my long-term prognosis. What should I do?

“You need to openly discuss your long-term concerns and any current issues with your healthcare provider. They should design a treatment plan that fits your type of diabetes, any related health issues, and the lifestyle changes you’re able to make.”

What’s new in diabetes treatment options?

“Current technology includes more precise glucometers, continuous glucose monitoring devices, insulin pumps, diabetes-related apps, and enhanced communication between patients and providers (sending data and receiving advice). There are also new types of insulin and many new drugs to treat diabetes. None of these should be used universally, nor are they necessary for all patients. Your physician can weigh the benefits versus costs before prescribing what’s best for you.”

What if I can’t afford my diabetes treatment?

“The cost of treatment is a major challenge in the U.S. and worldwide. Newer drugs and devices can be effective, but they aren’t always available to a large majority of patients. If you can’t afford a particular medicine or test, discuss the alternatives with your healthcare provider. Many times, cheaper alternatives are as good as the costly medications or tests.”

Discount programs for diabetes medications and monitoring tools are available in some circumstances. In addition, you may be able to lower your dependence on prescription diabetes drugs through dietary changes and weight loss. With current technology, newer medications, and our understanding of the role of diet and exercise, most people with diabetes can enjoy a stable, active lifestyle. Don’t hesitate
to discuss your treatment options with your doctor.

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FAQ

What are the main types of diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus occurs when your blood sugar levels or glucose levels are too high. Glucose is your body's main source of energy. After eating or drinking something, your body releases insulin, which helps make the glucose available to your cells for energy.

Individuals with Type 1 diabetes are unable to produce insulin, a hormone manufactured by the pancreas. Insulin helps the glucose you receive from food enter your cells to produce energy. Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age and happens when the immune system attacks and destroys the cells in your pancreas that make insulin.

What are the symptoms of Type 1 diabetes?

- Excess thirst
- Frequent urination
- Blurry vision
- Extreme fatigue
Extreme hunger
Weight loss

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes, making up approximately 95 percent of adult cases. It occurs when your body does not make or use insulin well.

Although individuals can develop this type of diabetes at any age, it most often occurs in middle-aged and older people. In fact, diabetes affects 1 in 4 people over the age of 65. Other risk factors include a family history of diabetes, being overweight, lack of physical activity, and health problems such as high blood pressure. Some women develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy. Gestational diabetes can be treated, but those women are at higher risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

What are the symptoms of Type 2 diabetes?

Symptoms of Type 2 develop slowly, so you may not notice them, or you may have no symptoms at all. Symptoms may include:

- Increased hunger, thirst, and urination
- Feeling tired
- Blurred vision
- Numbness or tingling in your feet or hands
- Slow-healing or non-healing sores
- Unexplained weight loss