

# Health Education Fact Sheet

*From Nurses for You*

*Nursing Best  
Practice Guideline*

## Diabetes & You

### What is Diabetes?

It is a disease that affects many people throughout their lives. If it is not treated, high blood sugar (glucose) levels can cause heart disease and kidney problems. It can also cause vision problems, nerve damage, amputations, and problems with sexual function.

#### *There are 3 main types of diabetes:*

**Type 1:** 10% of people with diabetes have this type. The body is unable to produce insulin. Insulin is a substance that helps the body produce energy from the food we eat. Type 1 diabetes is often found at a young age. People with this type need insulin shots as part of the treatment.

**Type 2:** Affects about 90% of people with diabetes. This occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin. It can also happen when the body does not make proper use of the insulin it does make.

**Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM):** This type of diabetes lasts for a short period of time during pregnancy and affects 3.5% of pregnant women. This may put mother and baby at higher risk for getting diabetes later in life.

#### *What are the signs and symptoms of diabetes?*

These may include:

- Thirst
- Weight change (gain or loss)
- Cuts and bruises that are slow to heal
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet
- Getting or keeping an erection may be a problem
- Frequent urination
- Very tired (no energy)
- Blurred vision
- Frequent infections

People with type 2 diabetes may not show any or all of these signs. Finding out you have diabetes early is important so that steps can be taken to manage blood sugar levels and prevent or delay problems. It is important to have regular check ups with your doctor or nurse to maintain your health.

#### *How do you manage diabetes?*

You can expect to live an active and healthy life if your blood sugar is well controlled. Learn more about diabetes by talking to your family doctor, nurse or diet expert.



**RNAO**

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario  
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers  
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NURSING BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES PROGRAM

Your healthcare team can help you to make healthy choices. These healthy choices may include:

**Lifestyle:** Keep a healthy weight and stay active. Watch what you eat and how much you eat. Food plays a major role in how your body works to maintain blood sugar levels. You will need to make good food choices. Learn to reduce your stress level.

**Medication:** Treatment may involve the use of pills or a needle to assist your body in making or using insulin better. You may expect your nurse or other health expert to discuss how to prepare and give needles in a safe way. They will teach you how to prevent and treat low blood sugar. You will learn the early signs of a low sugar level and what to do when you are sick.

### *Why is foot care important when managing your diabetes?*

Foot troubles are one problem that may occur if diabetes is not well managed. Protect your feet by following these simple steps:

**Check your feet daily:** Look for redness, blisters or open areas. If you cannot do this yourself, have someone else check for you.

**Protect your feet – wear shoes:** Wear shoes that fit well, support your feet and are not too tight. Do not wear shoes that cause redness or sore areas. See a footwear expert if you are at high risk for foot problems.

**Keep your skin clean and soft:** Wash your feet often. Check that the water is not too hot before putting your feet in. Do not soak them. Dry well between your toes. Use unscented creams. Do not put cream between your toes.

**Don't hurt yourself with nail clippers or razors:** Cut your nails straight across. Get help to cut your nails, if needed. Do not cut hard or callused areas. Go to a local foot care clinic.

### *How often should I have a check up?*

You should have a yearly foot exam. This will help spot any foot problems that may increase your risk of having foot ulcers or sores. During the exam you can expect your nurse or doctor to:

- Ask you about any past problems with your feet
- Check your feet for numbness
- Check for unusual foot shape
- Check for blood flow problems

### *What should you do if you have a diabetic foot ulcer?*

If you are at high risk or have a foot ulcer, you may need a more detailed exam and special treatment. Find out more from experts in diabetes, footcare and other healthcare areas. The Canadian Diabetes Association, and Diabetes Centres are also a great resource.

The intent of this fact sheet is to inform you so you can make choices about your health. To find out more about our fact sheets and guidelines, please visit our website at [www.rnao.org/bestpractices](http://www.rnao.org/bestpractices)



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