

[Return to Web version](#)

## Prediabetes

### What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that occurs when a person's body doesn't make enough of the hormone insulin or can't use insulin properly. There are 2 types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes occurs when your body's pancreas doesn't produce any insulin. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas either doesn't produce enough insulin or your body's cells ignore the insulin. Between 90% and 95% of people who are diagnosed with diabetes have type 2 diabetes.

When you digest food, your body changes most of the food you eat into glucose (a form of sugar). Insulin allows this glucose to enter all the cells of your body and be used as energy. When you have diabetes, your body doesn't make enough insulin or can't use it properly, so the glucose builds up in your blood instead of moving into the cells. Too much glucose in the blood can lead to serious health problems, including heart disease and damage to the nerves and kidneys.

[Return to top](#)

### What is prediabetes?

Before people develop type 2 diabetes, they usually have prediabetes. In people who have prediabetes, blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough to say they have diabetes. Normal blood sugar is between 70 and 99 mg per dL. Blood sugar between 100 and 125 mg per dL suggests prediabetes. Blood sugar higher than 126 mg per dL is considered diabetes. People who have prediabetes have a high risk of eventually developing diabetes.

[Return to top](#)

### How can my doctor tell if I have prediabetes?

Your doctor can give you a blood test to check for prediabetes.

[Return to top](#)

### Who is at risk?

You are at risk for prediabetes if any of the following are true:

- You are overweight or obese.
- You have a parent, brother or sister who has diabetes.
- You had diabetes during pregnancy (called gestational diabetes) or had a baby who weighed more than 9 pounds at birth.

- You belong to any of the following ethnic groups: African American, Native American, Latin American or Asian/Pacific Islander.
- You have high blood pressure (above 140/90 mm Hg).
- Your high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol level (“good” cholesterol) is less than 40 mg per dL (for men) or less than 50 mg per dl (for women), or your triglyceride level is higher than 250 mg per dL.
- You are a woman who has [polycystic ovary syndrome \(PCOS\)](#).

[Return to top](#)

## **If I have prediabetes, can I avoid developing diabetes?**

You can lower your risk of developing diabetes by making changes in your lifestyle. If you are overweight, losing weight can help. Losing weight also helps lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Exercise is also important. Your exercise routine should include 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (such as brisk walking or swimming) at least 5 times a week. Ask your doctor what exercise level is safe for you.

You need to follow a healthy diet. Eat foods such as salads, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fish, beans, poultry and other meats. Don't eat a lot of sugar, honey or molasses. Eat foods made with whole grains instead of white flour.

Less than 30% of your total daily calories should come from fat. Less than 10% of your daily calories should come from saturated fat. Carbohydrates should make up 50% to 60% of your total daily calories. Your diet also should include at least 38 grams of fiber per day for men 50 years of age and younger and 25 grams per day for women 50 years of age and younger.

Your doctor might refer you to a dietitian or diabetes educator to help you change your eating habits.

[Return to top](#)

## **Can medicine help prevent or delay diabetes?**

Diabetes medicines are not as effective as diet and exercise. However, your doctor might prescribe medicine if you are at high risk for diabetes and have other medical problems, such as obesity, a high triglyceride level, a low HDL cholesterol level or high blood pressure.

[Return to top](#)

## **Other Organizations**

- [CDC Diabetes Public Health Resource](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes>
- [National Diabetes Education Program](http://www.ndep.nih.gov)  
<http://www.ndep.nih.gov>
- [American Diabetes Association](http://www.diabetes.org)  
<http://www.diabetes.org>
- [National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse](http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/)  
<http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/>

[Return to top](#)

## **Source**

[Written by familydoctor.org editorial staff.](#)

[Impaired Glucose Tolerance and Impaired Fasting Glucose](#) by Shobha S. Rao, M.D., Phillip Disraeli, M.D., and Tamara McGregor, M.D. (*American Family Physician* April 15, 2004, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20040415/1961.html>)

Reviewed/Updated: 01/11

Created: 01/07

[Copyright](#) © 2007-2011 [American Academy of Family Physicians](#)

[Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)

[About This Site](#) | [What's New](#) | [Advertising Policy](#)