

# About Type 1 Diabetes

## Key points

- With type 1 diabetes, your pancreas doesn't make insulin or makes very little insulin.
- People with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin every day.
- Currently, type 1 diabetes can't be prevented, but it can be treated effectively.

## Overview

If you have type 1 diabetes, your pancreas doesn't make insulin or makes very little insulin. Insulin helps blood sugar enter the cells in your body for use as energy.

Without insulin, blood sugar can't get into cells and builds up in the bloodstream. High blood sugar is damaging to the body and causes many of the symptoms and complications of diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes was once called insulin-dependent or juvenile diabetes. It often develops in children, teens, and young adults, but it can happen at any age.

Type 1 diabetes is less common than [type 2](#)—about 5-10% of people with diabetes have type 1. Currently, no one knows how to prevent type 1 diabetes, but it can be managed successfully by:

- Following your doctor's recommendations for living a healthy lifestyle.
- Managing your blood sugar.
- Getting regular health checkups.
- Getting [diabetes self-management education and support](#).

## Signs and symptoms

It can take months or years before [symptoms](#) of type 1 diabetes are noticed.

Type 1 diabetes symptoms can develop in just a few weeks or months. Once symptoms appear, they can be severe.

Some type 1 diabetes symptoms are similar to symptoms of other health conditions. Don't guess! If you think you could have type 1 diabetes, see your doctor to get your blood sugar tested. Untreated diabetes can lead to very serious—even fatal—health problems.

Keep Reading:

[Just Diagnosed With Type 1 Diabetes](#)

## Risk factors

You can get type 1 diabetes at any age, but it usually develops in children, teens, or young adults.

Risk factors for type 1 diabetes are not as clear as for prediabetes and type 2 diabetes. Known risk factors include:

- **Family history:** Having a parent, brother, or sister with type 1 diabetes.

- **Age:** You can get type 1 diabetes at any age, but it usually develops in children, teens, or young adults.

In the United States, White people are more likely to develop type 1 diabetes than African American and Hispanic or Latino people.

## Causes

Type 1 diabetes is thought to be caused by an autoimmune reaction (the body attacks itself by mistake). This reaction destroys the cells in the pancreas that make insulin, called beta cells. This process can go on for months or years before any symptoms appear.

Some people have certain genes (traits passed on from parent to child) that increase their chance of developing type 1 diabetes. However, many of them won't go on to have type 1 diabetes even if they have the genes. A trigger in the environment, such as a virus, may also play a part in developing type 1 diabetes. Diet and lifestyle habits don't cause type 1 diabetes.

## Testing and screening

A [simple blood test](#) is used to screen for diabetes. If you were tested at a health fair or pharmacy, follow up at a clinic or doctor's office. That way you'll be sure the results are accurate.

If your doctor thinks you have type 1 diabetes, your blood may also be tested for autoantibodies. These substances indicate your body is attacking itself and are often found with type 1 diabetes but not with type 2. You may have

your urine tested for ketones. Ketones are produced when your body burns fat for energy. Having ketones in your urine indicates you have type 1 diabetes instead of type 2.

## **For parents**

If your young child has type 1 diabetes, you'll handle daily diabetes care, such as giving insulin injections and watching for and [treating hypoglycemia](#) (low blood sugar). You'll also need to stay in close contact with your child's health care team. They will help you understand the treatment plan and how to help your child stay healthy.

## **Treatment**

Unlike many health conditions, diabetes is [managed](#) mostly by you, with support from your health care team:

- Primary care doctor
- Foot doctor
- Dentist
- Eye doctor
- Registered dietitian nutritionist
- Diabetes educator
- Pharmacist

Also ask your family, teachers, and other important people in your life for help and support. Managing diabetes can be challenging, but everything you do to improve your health is worth it!

You'll need to take insulin shots (or wear an insulin pump) every day. Insulin is needed to manage your blood sugar levels and give your body energy. You can't take insulin as a pill. That's because the acid in your stomach would destroy it before it could get into your bloodstream. Your doctor will work with you to figure out the most effective type and dosage of insulin for you.

You'll also need to [do regular blood sugar checks](#). Ask your doctor how often you should check it and what your target blood sugar levels should be.

Keeping your blood sugar levels as close to target as possible will help you prevent or delay [diabetes-related complications](#).

[Hypoglycemia](#) and [diabetic ketoacidosis](#) are common complications of diabetes, and you'll need to know how to handle them. Meet with your doctor for step-by-step instructions.

Stress is a part of life, but it can make managing diabetes harder. Regular physical activity, getting enough sleep, and exercises to relax can help. Talk to your doctor and diabetes educator about these and other ways you can manage stress.

Healthy lifestyle habits are really important too:

- Making [healthy food choices](#)
- Being [physically active](#)
- Managing your [blood pressure](#)
- Managing your [cholesterol](#)

Regular appointments with your health care team can help you stay on track with your treatment plan and offer new ideas and strategies if needed.