

# Living with Diabetes<sup>1</sup>

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Diabetes is a disease that affects more than 20 million Americans. Although there is no cure, with proper care diabetes can be managed. If you have diabetes, your best way to “live well” is to learn about the disease and work with your doctor to develop a healthy living plan that is right for you.

## What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease in which your body is not able to use food properly. Normally, most of the food you eat is changed into glucose (sugar). This is the main energy source for the body. For your body to use this energy, the glucose must get into the cells.

Insulin, a hormone made in the pancreas, is the “key” that helps glucose get into your cells.

With diabetes, insulin is not made or it does not work right. This causes glucose to build up in your blood, which can lead to serious health problems. Having high blood glucose levels over time causes most health complications of diabetes.



## Who gets diabetes?

**Anyone** can get diabetes, but some people have a greater chance than others. People who are at high risk for diabetes include:

- blood relatives of people with diabetes

- women who have had babies weighing 9 pounds or more at birth
- women who had diabetes when pregnant
- African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans
- people with high blood pressure
- people with very high blood cholesterol
- people who are obese
- persons over age 45



## Types of diabetes

**Type 1.** In type 1 diabetes, the pancreas stops making insulin. It usually develops before the age of 30. People with type 1 diabetes **must** take insulin to live. Eating well and being physically active also are important.

**Type 2.** With type 2 diabetes, the pancreas doesn't make enough insulin and/or the insulin it makes doesn't work right. Management includes eating well, being physically active, losing weight, and taking medications if needed.

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## How do you know if you have diabetes?

The best way to determine if you have diabetes is the fasting blood glucose test. This simple test uses a small amount of blood from your vein after an overnight fast.

Normal:	Less than 100 mg/dL
Pre-Diabetes:	100-125 mg/dL
Diabetes:	126 mg/dL or higher
mg/dL = milligrams of glucose per deciliter (100 milliliters), of blood	

## Possible health problems

Many people with diabetes live long healthy lives. However, diabetes can cause serious health problems like blindness, heart disease, and kidney disease. You can delay or prevent these problems by keeping your blood glucose levels in good control.



## What is “good control?”

Good control of your blood glucose means keeping it as close to normal as you can. Ask your doctor what **your** blood glucose goal is.

For most non-pregnant adults with diabetes the goals for blood glucose are:

Before meals:	80 to 120 mg/dL
After meals:	less than 180 mg/dL

Blood glucose goals may be different for people with other illnesses or conditions, and for the very young or for persons over age 65. Ask your doctor what the best blood glucose range is for you.

## Managing your diabetes

You can manage your diabetes with a “healthy living” plan. You and your health care team can put together a plan that works for you. To keep your blood glucose level as close to the normal range as possible you need to take good care of yourself by:

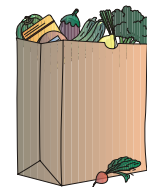
- eating well
- staying active
- taking medicine if needed
- recording blood glucose levels
- talking with your doctor



## Eating well

Eating well can help you keep your blood glucose as close to normal as possible. It also will help in controlling your weight.

There is no one “diet” for all people with diabetes. To eat well, follow an eating plan that works for YOU. It’s best to work with a registered dietitian (RD).



Select foods that you enjoy and that contain the nutrients you need for good health. In the MyPyramid graphic (see next page), food groups are represented by vertical bands. From left to right, the food groups in MyPyramid are:

- ✓ Grains
- ✓ Vegetables
- ✓ Fruits
- ✓ Milk
- ✓ Meat and Beans

The thin line between Fruits and Milk represents oils, which we need in small amounts.



Each food group in MyPyramid has a slogan that gives you a hint about selecting a healthy diet. See how much of this advice you follow now, and think about changes you might make:

Make half your grains whole.  
Vary your veggies.  
Focus on fruits.  
Get your calcium-rich foods.  
Go lean with protein.

For a healthy diet that will help you manage your diabetes, select foods that are high in nutrients and low in solid fats, cholesterol, sugar, and sodium most often. It will be helpful if you get help from your family or friends in trying new foods and recipes. Be adventurous!

### Staying active

Being physically active will help to control your blood glucose. Staying active also will help you feel better and can help manage your weight. This helps to lower your risk of health complications. Choose activities that you enjoy, and try exercising with a friend or family member.



### Taking medicine if needed

Taking medicines often is part of diabetes care. If you take diabetes medication, be sure to take them as prescribed.

### Recording blood glucose levels

Keeping track of your blood glucose is critical. Your doctor will tell you when to check your blood glucose and how to use your blood glucose meter.

For more information about diabetes medicines and blood glucose monitoring, see the publication FCS8542 *Living with Diabetes: The Right Approach* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### Talking with your doctor

**You** are an important part of your health care team! Include on your team: a doctor, nurse, registered dietitian (RD), and a certified diabetes educator (CDE). Regular visits to your health care provider allow you to check your progress and make changes as needed.

Your doctor will review the medicines you are taking and make changes if needed. Be sure to mention any concerns that you have.

Make the most of these visits by sharing your feelings and concerns. It's helpful to prepare for these visits. Keep a journal of how you have been feeling and what you do to manage your diabetes. Also, write down questions in your journal as you think of them. That way you'll get the most out of your next visit.



Some points you may want to share with your health care providers include:

- how you have been feeling
- your usual eating habits
- your daily activities
- daily medications, including types, dosages, and when taken
- new medicines you started since your last visit, (including herbals, over-the-counter medications, or prescriptions by other doctors)
- your blood glucose numbers (ask what time of day and how often you should test)



### Summary

Although there is no cure for diabetes, it is a disease that can be managed. You can help prevent health problems by taking an active role in your own wellness.

Take control of your blood glucose and your health by taking good care of yourself.

### For more information

American Diabetes Association  
1701 North Beauregard Street  
Alexandria VA 22311  
800-342-2383  
<http://www.diabetes.org>

American Association of Diabetes Educators  
100 West Monroe  
Suite 400  
Chicago IL 60603  
800-338-3633  
<http://www.aadenet.org>

The American Dietetic Association  
120 South Riverside Plaza  
Suite 2000  
Chicago, IL 60606-6995  
800-877-1600  
<http://www.eatright.org>

MedicAlert Foundation International  
2323 Colorado Avenue  
Turlock, CA 95382  
888-633-4298  
<http://www.medicalert.org>

Local Resources (check your telephone book for numbers):

- Cooperative Extension Service
- Health Department
- Local Hospitals