

Some people wrongly describe Type 2 diabetes as 'mild' diabetes. There is no such thing as mild diabetes. All diabetes should be taken seriously and treated properly.

Other causes of diabetes

There are some other causes of diabetes, including certain diseases of the pancreas, but they are all very rare. Sometimes an accident or an illness may reveal diabetes if it is already there, but they do not cause it.

...and some things that do not cause diabetes:

- eating sweets or the wrong kind of food does not cause diabetes.
- stress does not cause diabetes although it may make the symptoms worse in people who already have the condition.
- you cannot catch diabetes from somebody, nor can you give to anyone.

How is diabetes treated?

Although diabetes cannot be cured, it can be treated very successfully. Knowing why people with diabetes develop high blood glucose levels will help you to understand how some of the treatments work.

When sugar and starchy foods have been digested, they turn into glucose. If somebody has diabetes, the glucose in their body is not turned into energy, either because there is not enough insulin in their body, or because the insulin that the body produces is not working properly. This causes the liver to make more glucose than usual but the body still cannot

turn the glucose into energy. The body then breaks down its stores of fat and protein to try to release more glucose but still this glucose cannot be turned into energy. This is why people with untreated diabetes often feel tired and lose weight. The unused glucose passes into the urine, which is why people with untreated diabetes pass large amounts of urine and are extremely thirsty.

Type 1 diabetes is treated by injections of insulin and a healthy diet. Type 2 diabetes is treated by a healthy diet or by a combination of healthy diet and tablets. Sometimes people with Type 2 diabetes also have insulin injections, although they are not totally 'dependent' on the insulin.

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For more information on diabetes call
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Advice on Diabetes



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What is diabetes?

Diabetes - or to give it its full name, diabetes mellitus - is a common condition in which the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body is unable to use it properly. This is because the body's method of converting glucose into energy is not working as it should.

Normally a hormone called insulin carefully controls the amount of glucose in our blood. Insulin is made by a gland called the pancreas, which lies just behind the stomach. It helps the glucose to enter the cells where it is used as fuel by the body.

We obtain glucose from the food we eat, either from sweet foods or from the starchy foods such as bread or potatoes. The liver can also make glucose. After a meal, the blood glucose level rises and insulin is released into the blood.

When the blood glucose level falls - for example, during physical activity - the level of insulin falls. Insulin, therefore, plays a vital role in regulating the level of blood glucose and, in particular, in stopping the blood glucose from rising too high.

There are two main types of diabetes. These are:

- Type 1 diabetes, also known as insulin dependent diabetes.
- Type 2 diabetes, also known as non insulin dependent diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes develops when there is a severe lack of insulin in the body because most or all of the cells in the pancreas that produce it have been destroyed.

This type of diabetes usually appears in people under the age of 40, often in childhood. It is treated by insulin injections and diet.

Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body can still produce some insulin, though not enough for its needs, or when the insulin that the body produces does not work properly.

This type of diabetes usually appears in people over the age of 40. It is treated by diet alone, or by a combination of diet and insulin injections.

What are the symptoms of diabetes?

The main symptoms of diabetes are:

- increased thirst
- going to the loo all the time - especially at night
- extreme tiredness
- weight loss
- genital itching or regular episodes of thrush
- blurred vision

Type 2 diabetes develops slowly and the symptoms are usually less severe.

Some people may not notice any symptoms at all and their diabetes is only picked up in a routine medical check up.

Some people may put the symptoms down to 'getting older' or 'overwork'.

Type 1 diabetes develops much more quickly, usually over a few weeks.

In both types of diabetes, the symptoms are quickly relieved once the diabetes is treated. Early treatment will also reduce the chances of developing any serious health problems.

Who gets diabetes and what causes it?

Diabetes is a common health condition. About 1.4 million people in the UK are known to have diabetes - that's about three in every 100 people. And for every person who knows that they have the condition, there is probably another person with diabetes who does not yet know. Over three quarters of people with diabetes have Type 2 diabetes.

Although the condition can occur at any age, it is rare in infants and becomes more common as people get older.

Type 1 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes develops when the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas have been destroyed. Nobody knows for sure why these cells have been damaged but the most likely cause is an abnormal reaction of the body to the cells. This may be triggered by viral or other infection. This type of diabetes generally affects younger people. Both sexes are affected equally.

Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes used to be called 'maturity onset' diabetes because it usually appears in middle-aged or elderly people, although it does occasionally appear in younger people. The main causes are that the body no longer responds normally to its own insulin, and/or that the body does not produce enough insulin.

People who are overweight are particularly likely to develop Type 2 diabetes. It tends to run in families and is more common in Asian and African-Caribbean communities.