

# DISABILITY and DIABETES FACT SHEET

## What is Diabetes?

“Diabetes is a chronic condition that stems from the body's inability to sufficiently produce and/or properly use insulin”. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007)

Diabetes is a condition in which the body cannot produce an important hormone called insulin. Insulin is produced in the pancreas. ***People with diabetes do not make enough insulin in their bodies or they have trouble using the insulin that their bodies produce.*** Diabetes can lead to serious complications and major disability.

### ***There are three types of diabetes:***

- **Type 1 diabetes** (formerly called juvenile-onset diabetes) is usually diagnosed during childhood or the teenage years, although it has been diagnosed much later in life. Type 1 diabetes has no known cure, and its cause is not yet known. People with type 1 diabetes must take insulin injections every day.
- **Type 2 diabetes** (once called adult diabetes but now found more and more often in children and teenagers) does not yet have a cure, but its causes are known and in many cases ***it can be prevented or delayed.*** The single biggest risk for type 2 diabetes is having a parent, brother or sister with the disease. Type 2 diabetes is just as serious as type 1, and can lead to serious health problems.
- **Gestational diabetes** is a temporary condition that can affect women during pregnancy. It only affects a small number of pregnant women (less than 5%) and it usually goes away after the pregnancy is over. However, both mothers and babies in these cases carry a high risk of getting type 2 diabetes as they get older.

Some people develop **Pre-Diabetes**, which is an early stage in the development of type 2 diabetes. People who are diagnosed as being prediabetic have a window of opportunity to practice the lifestyle tips described in this newsletter and reduce their risk of developing full-blown type 2 diabetes.

All types of diabetes can lead to serious complications that can affect health, independence and quality of life. They can also cut years off peoples' lives. **People with some types of disabilities may carry a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes and its complications.**

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## Complications of Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes

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| • Heart attacks  | • Stroke     | • Blindness       |
| • Kidney disease | • Amputation | • Premature death |
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## Are YOU At Risk of Developing Diabetes?

**Anyone can develop type 2 diabetes.** Some people have more 'risk factors' (personal characteristics and behaviours that are linked to diabetes) that make them more likely than other people to develop type 2 diabetes. **Make sure you understand your risk factors! Talk to a doctor if you are concerned that you are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes.**

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### **Risk Factors for Developing Type 2 Diabetes**

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- Having close relatives who have diabetes
  - Aboriginal Peoples
  - Being overweight
  - Having high blood pressure, high cholesterol or other fats in your blood
  - Being new to Canada
  - **Having certain types of disabilities**
  - Having family from Asia, South-East Asia, Latin America or Africa
  - Being over 40 years of age
  - Being physically inactive
  - Had gestational diabetes or a baby that weighed over 4 kg (9 lbs) at birth
  - Smoking
  - Being diagnosed with prediabetes
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### **Disability Groups with a Higher Risk for Developing Type 2 Diabetes**

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- Spinal Cord Injury
  - Blindness or Low Vision
  - Intellectual Disability
  - Seniors Who Have Disabilities
  - Mental Health Conditions
  - DEAF or Hard of Hearing
  - Learning Disabilities

**For more information on the links between these disabilities and diabetes, go to [www.ala.ca/content/diabetes.asp](http://www.ala.ca/content/diabetes.asp)**

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## Diagnosing and Treating Diabetes

***A diagnosis of diabetes must be made by a doctor.*** Diabetes is diagnosed by measuring the amount of sugar (glucose) in your system. See a doctor if you are having symptoms of the disease, or if you are overweight or have other signs that you are at risk for diabetes. Anyone over the age of 40 should have an impaired fasting glucose test every three years, and if you have any of the risk factors for type 2 diabetes, you should be screened more often. **People can have type 2 diabetes without showing any symptoms.** If you are concerned that you are at risk of developing diabetes, and especially if you have any of the risk factors or symptoms, ***take charge of your health and seek care from professionals right away!***

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## Symptoms of Diabetes

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- Feeling thirsty a lot of the time
  - Feeling hungry a lot of the time
  - Losing or gaining a lot of weight
  - Feeling unusually weak
  - Having tingling or numbness in your hands or feet
  - Having blurred vision
  - Needing to urinate often
  - Not having enough energy
  - Being unusually short tempered
  - Having cuts or bruises that heal slowly
  - Having frequent infections in the gums, skin or bladder
  - Having trouble getting or maintaining an erection (men)
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A **Diabetes Care Team** of professionals works with people who have diabetes to monitor their conditions and help them manage the disease so they can be as healthy and independent as possible.

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## Health Care Professionals Who Provide Care for Diabetes

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- Doctors
  - Diabetes Educators
  - Dentists
  - Physical Therapists
  - Foot care specialists (Podiatrists)
  - Exercise professionals
  - Social Workers
  - Nurses
  - Endocrinologists
  - Eye care specialists
  - Dietitians
  - Pharmacists
  - Psychologists
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If you have diabetes, **make sure that you are an active member of your care team.** If you are living with diabetes, there are important everyday strategies that will help to keep you healthy and prevent or delay the development of complications.

## **How Can You Reduce Your Risk of Getting Type 2 Diabetes?**

**Healthy living is one of the main keys to reducing your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.** It is also important to monitor your health and see health care professionals regularly. Learn as much as you can about your risk of developing diabetes.

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## Tips for Healthy Living and Preventing Type 2 Diabetes

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- Be physically active every day
  - Keep your weight down
  - Take care of your teeth and gums
  - Get regular health checkups
  - Eat healthy foods and don't overeat
  - Don't smoke
  - Monitor the medications you take
  - PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR HEALTH
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**Healthy Eating** is not expensive, boring or complicated. Use free or low cost healthy eating guides like the **Canada Food Guide** and the **Canadian Diabetes Association's Beyond the Basics** to help you understand how to eat healthy.

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### Basics of Healthy Eating

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- **Eat your meals at the same times every day**
  - **Do not overeat – eat a regular portion and wait 10 minutes after you've finished before deciding you need more food**
  - **Avoid fatty foods – especially fried foods**
  - **Do not skip meals**
  - **Eat lots of fresh food – fruit and vegetable juice are also good.**
  - **Avoid sweets**
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While it is important to build some physical activity into your daily routine, it does not have to be a big challenge. Simply getting out for a walk of a wheel will boost your energy and help to keep you healthy. **Just thirty minutes of physical activity a day will meet your body's needs.**

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### Basics of Being Physically Active

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- **Just going for a 30 minute walk or wheel will help your health.**
  - **Community centres and schools offer sports and recreation programs in most areas. If your local centre's programs are not accessible, talk to the staff about your needs.**
  - **Try to get involved in different types of physical activity. Physical therapists and recreation specialists can help you design a physical activity program that suits your needs and abilities.**
  - **Functional electrical stimulation (stimulating muscles with low level electricity) can help people with little motor control get the physical activity they need.**
  - **Large indoor spaces like malls can be good places to get some physical activity when the weather is bad.**
  - **Short periods of activity every day are better than occasional hard workouts. Wheeling a wheelchair or walking for half an hour a day are good ways to get active.**
  - **Upper body activity can be a good option for people who use wheelchairs. Use hand weights to develop muscle strength.**
  - **Exercising with a partner can boost your motivation and help you be physically active safely, especially if you have a vision or mobility impairment.**
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### For More Information On Disability And Diabetes:

- **Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability** [www.ala.ca](http://www.ala.ca) or
- **The Canadian Diabetes Association** [www.cda.ca](http://www.cda.ca) or
- **Canadian Public Health Agency** [www.phac.ca](http://www.phac.ca)

**ON GUARD – Against Diabetes** is available as a free download at [www.ala.ca](http://www.ala.ca)