



What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that results in too much sugar in the blood. It is caused either by the failure of the body to make enough insulin (Type 1), or the failure of the body to use its own insulin (Type 2).

Ten per cent of people with diabetes have Type 1. People with Type 1 diabetes must administer daily insulin injections and must carefully monitor their blood sugar levels, physical activity and food intake. People with Type 1 diabetes will die if they do not take their insulin.

Type 2 diabetes accounts for 90% of all cases of diabetes. It is managed with changes in food intake and physical activity and by regular monitoring of blood sugar. People with Type 2 diabetes may also require daily oral diabetes medication and/or insulin by injection.

Diabetes that occurs in pregnancy (gestational diabetes) is usually managed by changes in food intake and physical activity, but may also require insulin by injection. Sugar levels often return to normal after delivery of the baby, but both the mother and baby are at increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes in the future.

Diabetes may cause both short-term and long-term health problems. Chronic high blood sugar levels affect the eyes, kidneys, nerves and blood vessels. Diabetes is a major cause of heart disease. In adults, it is also the leading cause of blindness, kidney failure and loss of limbs due to amputation.

Diabetes often disables people in their prime years. It has a profound, negative effect on the quality of life of individuals living with diabetes and their families.⁽¹⁾

Definitions of terms used in this document can be found in Appendix G.
