

What is Diabetes?

A DEFINITION

Diabetes is a **complex condition** characterized by high blood glucose/sugar. It is a serious, life-long condition that affects all aspects of one's life. It occurs when the pancreas can no longer make insulin, or when the body cannot make good use of the insulin it produces.

INSULIN

Insulin is a hormone that acts like a key to allow glucose to pass from the bloodstream into the cells in the body to produce energy.



WHO CLASSIFICATION

According to the latest WHO classification, there are **14 distinct types of diabetes**. The most common are Type 1, Type 2 and Gestational Diabetes.



Long-term raised glucose levels in the blood (hyperglycaemia) can damage organs and tissues in the body. Managing blood glucose effectively is a full-time job for people living with diabetes, requiring uninterrupted access to the appropriate medicines, technologies and care.

IMPORTANT

Although there are different types of diabetes, each one is serious and can lead to life-threatening complications if not adequately managed.



MOST COMMON TYPES OF DIABETES

- **Type 1 Diabetes** can develop at any age but occurs most often in children and adolescents. The body produces little to no insulin and daily insulin injections are required to survive.
- **Type 2 Diabetes** tends to emerge later in life and accounts for ~90% of all diabetes cases. The body does not make good use of the insulin it produces and progressively produces less over time. Type 2 Diabetes is treated with a wide range of medicines and/or insulin injections.
- **Gestational Diabetes (GDM)** develops during pregnancy and can lead to complications for both mother and child. GDM usually disappears after pregnancy but the woman and child are at increased risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes later in life.

Organ transplants, certain drugs and chemicals, and potentially some viral infections including COVID-19, may trigger diabetes.

WHAT CAUSES DIABETES?

Type 1 Diabetes is an **auto-immune disorder** by which the immune system destroys insulin-producing cells. We do not know what causes this.

Type 2 Diabetes is associated with **unmodifiable (genetic, physiological, environmental) and modifiable (behavioural) risk factors**. No one risk factor is either necessary or sufficient to develop Type 2 Diabetes.





MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF DIABETES

People with Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes share similar symptoms, but the symptoms of Type 1 tend to come on much more quickly, particularly in children. People can live with Type 2 Diabetes for many years without realising it, as symptoms might not show. It is estimated that in 2019 more than one-third of adults in Europe living with diabetes were undiagnosed.

If left undiagnosed or untreated, diabetes can cause serious complications and other health conditions, e.g., worldwide 21% of adults with diabetes suffer from coronary heart disease and 32% suffer from cardiovascular disease.

ACUTE COMPLICATIONS

- Hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar)
- Hyperosmolar Hyperglycaemic State (HSS)
- Diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA)

CHRONIC COMPLICATIONS

- Heart attack and stroke
- Kidney disease (nephropathy)
- Eye problems (retinopathy)
- Dental problems (gum disease)
- Nerve damage (neuropathy)
- Sexual problems in women and men

- Frequent urination
- Dry mouth/ constant thirst
- Tiredness/fatigue
- Weight loss
- Frequent infections (skin, gums vaginal)
- Cuts and wounds take longer to heal
- Blurred vision

FACTS

~ 32 million people lived with diabetes in the European Union in 2019. Diabetes-related health expenditure stood at around €100bn in 2019



Diabetes management also carries a heavy psychological burden. People with diabetes are 2-3 times more likely to have depression. Only 25-50% of people with diabetes who have depression get diagnosed and treated.

LOWERING THE RISK OF DEVELOPING DIABETES AND DIABETES-RELATED COMPLICATIONS

Type 1 Diabetes cannot be prevented, but strategies do exist to lower the risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes and GDM. They include the creation of health-enabling environments, taxation policies, awareness-raising campaigns, education, and early action, such as screening. Uninterrupted access to medicines and care is also necessary to lower the risk of diabetes-related complications.