



Best Doctors® REPORT

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A Word from Best Doctors

Diabetes is so widespread that many of us know someone who has been affected by it – a friend, a family member, maybe even ourselves. And the disease is only going to become more prevalent: in Canada, diabetes rates have almost doubled over the past decade and are expected to continue rising. Currently more than one in four Canadians is living with diabetes or prediabetes. By 2020 this number is projected to rise to more than one in three Canadians.¹

What impact will these soaring rates have on Canadians and our health care system? The costs are many. There's the heavy economic burden: diabetes cost our health care system and economy \$11.7 billion in 2010, a total expected to reach \$16 billion by 2020.²

There is also the personal toll associated with the disease: left untreated or improperly managed, diabetes can lead to complications including stroke, heart attack, kidney failure, nerve damage, blindness and amputation. Public programs and services for those living with diabetes, as well as affordability and access to diabetes medications and supplies, vary throughout Canada.

Amazingly, diabetes (specifically, type 2 diabetes) is in many ways preventable. In fact, it's estimated that more than half of type 2 diabetes cases can be prevented or delayed simply by following a healthier diet and increasing physical activity. Proper intervention can also reduce diabetes-related complications and mortality by nearly 60 per cent.³ And there's more reason for hope: unlike many other chronic diseases, diabetes can be effectively managed, allowing sufferers to still enjoy long and active lives.

Diabetes Explained

Diabetes is a chronic disease in which the body either cannot produce insulin or can't properly use the insulin it produces (insulin is a hormone that keeps blood sugar levels in balance). This leads to high levels of glucose in the blood, which can potentially damage blood vessels, organs and nerves. There are three types of diabetes: **type 1**, **type 2**, and **gestational diabetes**.

¹ Canadian Diabetes Association, <http://www.diabetes.ca/CDA/media/documents/publications-and-newsletters/advocacy-reports/canada-at-the-tipping-point-english.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

With **type 1 diabetes**, the immune system kills cells in the pancreas responsible for releasing insulin. The result is that either no insulin, or very little of it, is released into the body when blood glucose levels get too high, leading to a build-up of glucose in the blood. About five to 10 per cent of people with diabetes have type 1 diabetes. This type of diabetes usually develops in childhood or adolescence (though it can also develop in adulthood).

About 90 per cent of sufferers have **type 2 diabetes**, in which the body is unable to properly use insulin that's released or cannot make enough insulin. The result is that glucose builds up in the blood instead of being used as energy. This type of diabetes is more common in adults, though children may also be affected.

Gestational diabetes occurs during pregnancy. Although blood glucose levels return to normal once the pregnancy ends, gestational diabetes leads to an increased risk of both the mother and child developing diabetes in the future. Up to 30 per cent of women who have had gestational diabetes will develop type 2 diabetes within 15 years.⁴

Prediabetes occurs when blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as type 2 diabetes. Almost 50 per cent of people with prediabetes develop type 2 diabetes.

⁴ Canadian Diabetes Association, <http://www.diabetes.ca/about-diabetes/risk-factors/mothers-at-risk>

FACTS:

- **Diabetes is a growing global epidemic – at the root of this are rising rates of obesity and an increase in sedentary lifestyles.**
- **Total deaths from diabetes are projected to rise by more than 50 per cent over the next 10 years.**
- **Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases among children and youth.**
- **Individuals with diabetes are over 3 times more likely to be hospitalized with cardiovascular disease than those without diabetes, 12 times more likely to be hospitalized with end-stage renal disease and almost 20 times more likely to be hospitalized with non-traumatic lower limb amputations.**

Sources:

1. World Health Organization (http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/diabetes/01_en.html).
2. Public Health Agency of Canada (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/publications/diabetes-diabete/facts-figures-faits-chiffres-2011/highlights-saillants-eng.php#chp4>).

Are You at Risk?

Many Canadians with diabetes aren't even aware that they have the disease. While it's still uncertain what causes type 1 diabetes, there are known risk factors for type 2 diabetes. These include:

- Having a parent or sibling with diabetes
- Giving birth to a baby that weighed more than nine pounds at birth
- Having developed gestational diabetes during pregnancy
- Being a member of a high-risk group (e.g. Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian or African descent)
- A diagnosis of prediabetes
- High blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Being overweight (especially around the midsection)

If you have one or more risk factors, you should get tested for diabetes. It's also recommended that people over the age of 40 get tested every few years. An early diagnosis is critical in managing and treating the disease.

Signs and Symptoms

The following symptoms may indicate diabetes:

- Unusual thirst
- Frequent urination
- Blurred vision
- Extreme fatigue/lack of energy
- Weight change
- Tingling/numbness in the hands or feet
- Cuts and bruises that heal slowly
- Frequent/recurring infections



Be sure to see your doctor if you have any of these symptoms. In children, diabetes symptoms include wetting the bed, drinking and going to the bathroom more often than usual and a lack of energy. Be sure to see your child's doctor if your child exhibits any of these symptoms.



Living with Diabetes

Diabetes is diagnosed by a test that measures the amount of glucose in the blood. With early detection and proper management of the disease, it's possible to live a long and healthy life.

This often entails making lifestyle changes, including monitoring blood glucose levels regularly (you can use a home monitor), following a healthy diet, getting regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight and reducing stress. Diabetes is also treated with insulin therapy and other medications.

Gestational diabetes can also be managed by following a healthy diet during pregnancy, being physically active, achieving a normal pregnancy weight gain and if needed, getting insulin injections.

The Canadian Diabetes Association (CDA) suggests the following blood glucose ranges as a general guide:

Target level by type	Before meals and fasting
Non-diabetic adults	4 to 7 mmol/L
Type 2 diabetes	4 to 7 mmol/L
Type 1 diabetes	4 to 7 mmol/L
Children w/ type 1 diabetes	4 to 10 mmol/L

How Best Doctors Can Help

Prevention of diabetes through diet, exercise and other lifestyle choices (for example, not smoking) is the most effective way to combat the increasing incidence of this disease among Canadians. But given rising rates of diabetes in the country (and taking into account factors that can't be controlled plus incidences of type 1 diabetes, which is not preventable), it's also evident that being educated about the disease will make a big difference when it comes to lowering mortality rates. If you suspect you may have diabetes based on the symptoms or risk factors associated with the disease, make sure you seek medical attention immediately. And if you need support, remember that Best Doctors is always here to help. **Best Doctors can help you find: the best endocrinologist; group support; information on healthy eating; and answers to questions on medication or lifestyle management.**



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