

Type 1 diabetes: the basics



What is type 1 diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes is a disease in which the pancreas does not produce any insulin. Insulin is a hormone that helps your body to control the level of sugar (glucose) in your blood. Without insulin, sugar builds up in your blood instead of being used for energy. Your body produces sugar and also gets sugar from foods like bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, milk and fruit.

The cause of type 1 diabetes remains unknown. It is not caused by eating too much sugar, and is not preventable. The current thought is that type 1 diabetes occurs when the body's immune system destroys the cells that make insulin.

Insulin therapy

Insulin therapy is required for the treatment of type 1 diabetes. There are a variety of insulins available to help manage diabetes. Insulin is injected by pen, syringe or pump. Your doctor will work with you to determine:

- The number of insulin injections you need per day
- The timing of your insulin injections
- The dose of insulin you need with each injection

The insulin treatment your doctor prescribes will depend on your goals, age, lifestyle, meal plan, general health and motivation. Social and financial factors may also need to be considered.

The good news

You can live a long and healthy life by keeping your blood sugar levels in the target range set by you and your health-care provider:

You can do this by:

- Taking insulin as recommended (and other medications, if prescribed by your doctor)
- Monitoring your blood sugar levels regularly using a home blood glucose meter*
- Eating healthy meals and snacks
- Enjoying regular physical activity
- Aiming for a healthy body weight
- Managing stress effectively

*Discuss with your health-care provider how often you should measure your blood sugar level

Get the support you need

A positive and realistic attitude toward your diabetes can help you manage it. Talk to others who have type 1 diabetes or their caregivers. Ask your local Diabetes Canada branch about additional resources, joining a peer-support group or taking part in an information session.



Who can help you?

Your health-care team is there to help you. Depending on your needs and the resources available in your community, your team may include a family doctor, diabetes educator (nurse and/or dietitian), endocrinologist, pharmacist, social worker, exercise physiologist, psychologist, foot-care specialist, eye-care specialist. They can answer your questions about how to manage diabetes and work with you to adjust your food plan, activity and medications.

Remember, you are the most important member of your health-care team

Complications of diabetes

Over time, high blood sugar levels can cause complications such as blindness, heart disease, kidney problems, nerve damage and erectile dysfunction. Fortunately, good diabetes care and management can prevent or delay the onset of these complications.

You can reduce your chances of developing these complications if you:

- Keep your blood sugar within your target range*
- Avoid smoking
- Keep your cholesterol and other blood fats within your target range*
- Keep your blood pressure within your target range*
- Take care of your feet
- Have regular visits with your doctor, diabetes team, dentist and eye-care specialist

*Discuss your target ranges with your health-care provider

Related articles: *Managing your blood sugar, Physical activity and diabetes, Just the basics (tips for healthy eating), Cholesterol and diabetes, High blood pressure and diabetes, Smoking and diabetes, Foot care: a step toward good health, and Staying healthy with diabetes*

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