

Preventing Type 2 Diabetes in Children and Teens

Type 2 diabetes once hit mainly adults. But today, children and teens weigh more and are less active. As a result, people of all ages now get type 2 diabetes.

Types of Diabetes in Children

Type 1 diabetes was once called juvenile diabetes. It usually starts suddenly with weight loss, great thirst, and frequent urination. It tends to occur in thin or normal-weight people. Type 1 diabetes must be treated with insulin shots.

Type 2 diabetes tends to occur in overweight people. It is also more common in people of African, Hispanic, Asian, or American-Indian ancestry. Type 2 diabetes often starts slowly. People may have vague symptoms or none at all. Some people can control their type 2 diabetes with a healthy diet and exercise. But others must take diabetes pills or insulin.

Type 1 and type 2 diabetes are by far the most common forms of diabetes. But in rare cases, children get other kinds of diabetes.

Before Type 2 Diabetes Starts

Some children and teens have a higher risk of getting type 2 dia-

betes. Traits that are often found in people before they get type 2 diabetes are:

- Non-European ancestors
- Close relatives with type 2 diabetes
- High cholesterol levels
- Dark patches of skin, often on the back of the neck
- Overweight
- High blood pressure
- High triglyceride (a kind of fat) levels
- High blood glucose levels
- Low HDL (“good”) cholesterol levels

The risks for heart disease and diabetes increase for those who have high triglycerides, high blood glucose, low HDL cholesterol, and high blood pressure and who are overweight.

How to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is partly genetic. Even so, it can be prevented or delayed in most cases. The key is a healthy lifestyle.

Food choices. The healthiest diet is one high in plant foods and low in salt and saturated fats (which are found in meat

and also in dairy products that aren’t nonfat). To improve your child’s diet:

- Don’t buy junk food, such as soft drinks, chips, cookies, doughnuts, and candy.
- Have healthful foods on hand for snacks and lunch bags. More healthy choices might include nonfat milk, nuts, fresh fruit, baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, low-fat cheese, and whole-grain low-sugar breakfast cereals.
- Buy whole grains (such as oatmeal, barley, whole-wheat bread and pasta, and brown rice) instead of refined grains (such as white bread, white pasta, and white rice).
- Limit visits to fast-food restaurants or don’t go at all.
- Have your child eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Serve meals at the same times each day.
- Serve small portions.
- Serve fruit for dessert instead of cake, pie, or other foods high in fat and sugar.
- Instead of frying foods, cook them in low-fat ways. These include baking, broiling, roasting, grilling, steaming, and boiling.

- Set a good example by eating a healthful diet yourself.

Activity choices. The more active people are, the more calories they burn. Children and teens should be physically active for at least 60 minutes most or all days of the week. To help your children be more active:

- Limit time in front of the TV and computer to less than 2 hours a day.
- Assign them active chores such as raking leaves and vacuuming rugs.
- Have children walk or ride their bikes to school if it is close.
- Be active as a family. Go for walks, ride bikes, jump rope, or play basketball together.
- Encourage brisk play.
- Set a good example by being active yourself.

Other actions. There are other ways you can help your children avoid diabetes:

- Take them for regular medical checkups.
- If you think a child may be too heavy, don't put him or her on a weight-loss diet by yourself. Overweight children still need nutrients and calories to grow. Ask your doctor how to help your child lose weight.

If Your Child Gets Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes treatment has three goals:

- Get blood glucose levels as close to normal as you can.
- Get A1C levels as close to normal as you can. A1C reflects long-term blood glucose control.
- Prevent damage to the eyes, kidney, nerves, and heart.

Being overweight makes it harder to control diabetes. For this reason, striving for a healthy weight may also be part of type 2 diabetes treatment.

A child or teen who gets type 2 diabetes needs expert advice on diet and exercise. A dietitian can help both the child and the family learn to eat in a healthy way. A pediatric exercise counselor can help the child and family start an exercise program. In all cases, it's a good idea for the whole family to change its habits.

Type 2 diabetes tends to get worse over time. After a while, people with type 2 diabetes may need drugs to keep their blood glucose levels under control, even if they've taken good care of themselves. Drugs include insulin and many types of diabetes medicines.

