



Type 2 diabetes alarming among older people

Type 2 diabetes is spiking among seniors, and it is essential to monitor the disease properly. This could put you more at risk for COVID-19 as well and is one of the most common “underlying health conditions” leaving you vulnerable to the virus. This article appeared in [Aging.Com](https://www.aging.com)

Diabetes is one of the biggest health issues today, and it's only affecting more people as the population grows. The *Centre for Disease Control* in the US says more than 34 million Americans have some form of diabetes. That number makes up just under 10% of the entire American population. Around 25% of those 65 and older have diabetes, the CDC says, meaning about 12 million seniors have the condition.

These are astronomical numbers. The *World Health Organization* expects diabetes to be the seventh leading cause of death worldwide by 2030. And because so many people have it, Americans spend huge amounts of money on treatment and medication.

Worse yet, some experts believe the number of Americans who have diabetes can increase to one in three by 2050, if current trends continue. This is due in part to an increasingly older population - one that is more at risk for developing diabetes as they age. In the very best scenarios, experts believe that one in five Americans will have diabetes by 2050.

“These are alarming numbers that show how critical it is to change the course of type 2 diabetes,” said Ann Albright, the director of CDC's Division of Diabetes Translation.

She stressed that we must develop “successful programs to improve lifestyle choices on healthy eating and physical activity ... because the stakes are too high and the personal toll too devastating to fail.”

The first step in combating diabetes is being informed - understanding what it is, how to take preventative measures, and how to treat the disease.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a disorder that affects the body's metabolism and how it processes food for energy purposes. When you are diagnosed with diabetes, that means that your body has difficulty processing the sugars from the food you eat. Because of this, your body's blood glucose (blood sugar) levels are too high. Over time, having too much sugar in your blood can have dire effects on your health and can affect your overall lifestyle, from your activity level to your diet.

The main player in processing sugar in your body is insulin. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't produce enough insulin or it doesn't use insulin the right way. Insulin is created in the pancreas, then released into the bloodstream, where it helps absorb the glucose and converts it to energy and helps keep blood sugar levels normal. This doesn't always happen, though. When your body doesn't use insulin properly, that is called "insulin resistance," which is the predecessor for type 2 diabetes. Sometimes your body doesn't produce insulin at all, and this is the main factor for developing type 1 diabetes.

Therefore, saying you have diabetes doesn't exactly paint the whole picture of your symptoms.

There are certain types of diabetes that occur at a young age (gestational diabetes, for example, develops in pregnant women), but we're going to look at how diabetes affects your health as you get older.

Type 2 diabetes more common among older people

How old you are plays a large role in the type of diabetes you're diagnosed with due to how your body handles insulin over your lifetime. While type 1 is most often developed at a younger age, type 2 is most commonly diagnosed in middle-aged and older people. This is due to lifelong eating and lifestyle habits that contribute to diabetes' development. So, seniors are at a greater risk for developing diabetes.

Simply put, elderly people have been exposed to sugar longer than other generations of people, so their chances of developing hyperglycaemia—"abnormally high" blood glucose levels— and, ultimately, type 2 diabetes is greater. Seniors of different races are also more likely to develop diabetes than others.

Prediabetes

Getting diagnosed with prediabetes means that, while your blood sugar is high, it's not consistently high enough to be considered to have type 2 diabetes. However, it does mean that you should immediately take action to reverse it. When you have prediabetes, your body is either slowly starting to reject insulin as a way of converting sugar to energy or it soon will. The ADA says that half of Americans 65 and older have prediabetes, which means that nearly 25 million seniors are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes. That is a staggeringly high number, given that another 25% of the senior population already has diabetes. An issue with prediabetes, though, is that there are generally no symptoms. If you are experiencing symptoms associated with diabetes, you may already have it.

It is imperative that your doctor stays on top of your blood sugar levels and that you start taking steps to live a healthier life if you are told you are prediabetic.

Causes

Prediabetes is a condition that is developed over your life, which means there are lifestyle choices combined with family history that play a role in developing prediabetes (and potentially full-on diabetes).

Because prediabetes is the first step to developing type 2 diabetes, the causes of type 2 diabetes are extremely similar to prediabetes.

Some of the more specific causes of prediabetes include:

1. Inactivity

The glucose that is burned for energy with the help of insulin is basically used to help fuel active humans. When you exercise, your body's muscles burn more glucose and use less insulin in the process, too, which helps reverse insulin resistance. So, if you're inactive, your muscles aren't burning the glucose and instead are storing it, resulting in higher blood sugar levels.

2. Genetics

You are more likely to develop prediabetes if you have a family history (parents, siblings) of diabetes.

3. Sleeping Patterns

Researchers say that your quality of sleep can affect how at risk you are for developing prediabetes or type 2 diabetes. Sleep deprivation and sleep disorders like sleep apnea have been linked to higher blood sugar levels and play a role in obesity, which is another cause of diabetes. In a study of good and poor sleepers with diabetes, researchers found that poor sleepers had 23% high blood glucose levels in the morning and 82% higher insulin resistance than normal sleepers with diabetes.

4. Excess Fat

This can be associated with inactivity, as a lifestyle full of not exercising while eating fatty, unhealthy foods can cause fat to store and affect your health. Excess fat, especially around the waist area, is harmful to the body and organs in it by increasing the inflammation it causes, according to the *National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)*. Over time, this inflammation has been shown to play a role in the development of insulin resistance, among other health issues like high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which can both be related to the presence of diabetes.

5. Metabolic Syndrome

This factor includes some aforementioned causes of diabetes, like high blood sugar and excess fat (especially around the waist), but it also includes issues like high blood pressure and high cholesterol and

triglyceride levels. All of these play a part in having a higher risk for prediabetes and developing type 2 diabetes.

6. Prevention

Just because you are diagnosed as prediabetic does not mean you will develop diabetes. You are more likely to, though, and you should start to pump the brakes immediately. As your blood sugar levels are climbing to dangerous levels when you are prediabetic, there are lifestyle changes you can make to help those numbers trickle down to normal levels once again.