

Diabetes Basics - Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes used to be called 'non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus' or adult-onset diabetes. It differs from type 1 diabetes in that the body makes some insulin, but not enough; also, the body can't use the insulin efficiently.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common type of diabetes, accounting for 90 to 95 percent of all diabetes. It usually develops after the age of 40. However, in the late 1990's, its incidence increased among young people. Experts are trying to determine why that is happening; they think it may be related to the increased incidence of obesity and sedentary lifestyles among young people in the US.

About 80 percent of those with type 2 diabetes are overweight. It is more common among people who are older, sedentary or obese, or have a family history of the disease. It may reappear in women who had gestational diabetes. It is more common among people of Asian, Hispanic, African or Native American ancestry.

Type 2 diabetes is a progressive disease that can cause significant, severe complications such as heart disease, kidney disease, blindness and loss of limbs through amputation. Treatment differs at various stages of the condition. In its early stages, many people with type 2 diabetes can control their blood glucose levels by losing weight, eating properly and exercising. Many may subsequently need oral medication, and some people with type 2 diabetes may eventually need insulin shots to control their diabetes and avoid the disease's serious complications.

Even though there is no cure for diabetes, proper treatment and glucose control enable people with type 2 diabetes to live normal, productive lives. A major advance for people at risk of developing type 2 diabetes - such as family members of those with the condition - occurred recently when it was shown that diet and exercise can prevent or delay type 2 diabetes. People at high risk, who already had early signs of impaired glucose tolerance, significantly reduced their risk by losing only 5-7 percent of their body weight and performing moderate physical activity for 30 minutes/day. Taking the diabetes medication metformin also reduced the risk.

Characteristics of Type 2 Diabetes

- Most common in adults, although more younger people are developing this type
- Usually slow onset with thirst, frequent urination, weight loss developing over weeks to months
- Usually runs in families
- Most people who get this type are overweight or obese
- Treatment usually begins with diet and exercise, progressing to use of oral medications and later to insulin as the disease advances
- Blood glucose levels may improve with weight loss, change in diet and increased exercise
- May be prevented or delayed in high-risk individuals by moderate weight loss and exercise