



DIABETES *facts* SHEET

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a lifelong condition where your body does not produce enough insulin, or your body cannot use the insulin it produces. Your body needs insulin to change the sugar from food into energy. When you don't have enough insulin, the sugar stays in your blood so that your "blood sugar level" gets too high. High blood sugar levels over long periods of time can cause complications such as: damage to blood vessels, kidneys, and difficulties with circulation.

There are three main types of diabetes: **type 1**, where the body makes little or no insulin; **type 2**, where the body makes insulin but cannot use it properly; and **gestational diabetes**, where the body is not able to properly use insulin during pregnancy. This type of diabetes goes away after the baby is born. Nine out of ten people with diabetes have type 2.

Aboriginal people in Canada are at greater risk for developing type 2 diabetes than other Canadians. Aboriginal children are also now being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a condition that in the past occurred mainly in older persons. Inuit rates of diabetes are not as high as other Aboriginal populations, however there is fear that the rates of type 2 diabetes are increasing among Inuit as well.

Many years ago, diabetes was not a concern for Aboriginal people. In earlier times, Aboriginal people needed to be very active in order to survive, and they also ate traditional foods. Some people think that the change in lifestyle for Aboriginal people has caused people to be less active and eat different foods. The sudden change of lifestyle puts Aboriginal people at a greater risk for developing diabetes than other Canadians.

For more information, or to be tested for diabetes, contact your health care provider.

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For more information please visit www.healthcanada.ca/diabetes

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Diabetes: what are the risks?

Aboriginal people in Canada are at greater risk for developing type 2 diabetes than other Canadians. Generally, the risk of developing type 2 diabetes increases as you age, but if you are an Aboriginal person, you are at greater risk for developing type 2 diabetes earlier in life. Aboriginal children are also now being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes - a condition that in the past occurred mainly in older persons. Inuit rates of diabetes are not as high as other Aboriginal populations, however there is fear that the rates of type 2 diabetes are increasing among Inuit as well.

Not everyone has the same chance of developing diabetes. You are more likely to develop diabetes if:

- ◆ you are overweight (especially if most of your weight is around your middle)
- ◆ you have a parent, brother or sister with diabetes
- ◆ you have trouble dealing with life problems (stress)
- ◆ you had a baby that weighed over 4 kg (9 lbs) at birth
- ◆ you had diabetes during your pregnancy
- ◆ you are not active.

The good news is that you can do something. You can decrease the chance of developing diabetes by eating well, being active and taking good care of YOU!

For more information on risks, or to be tested for diabetes, contact your health care provider.

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How do I know if I have diabetes?

There are several types of diabetes, but type 2 diabetes is the most common among Aboriginal peoples.

You might have type 2 diabetes if:

- ◆ you are often thirsty
- ◆ you go to the bathroom a lot (urinate)
- ◆ you lose weight without knowing why
- ◆ you do not have much energy
- ◆ you can't see well (blurred vision)
- ◆ you get more infections than usual
- ◆ you have cuts and bruises that heal slowly
- ◆ you feel tingling or numbness in your hands or feet.

On the other hand, many people who have type 2 diabetes may not have any of these signs. This is why it is important to be tested regularly for diabetes if you are an Aboriginal adult, or if you have any of the signs listed above.

It is important to know if you have diabetes. The sooner you know, the sooner you can take steps to help you live well with diabetes. People with diabetes can live long, healthy, happy lives.

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Living well with diabetes: Healthy eating

Healthy eating is important for overall health and well being. If you eat the right amount of healthy foods, you are less likely to develop diabetes. Healthy eating also helps control blood sugar levels of people who have diabetes. Healthy eating means:

Choosing a variety of foods:

Eat many different kinds of healthy foods like whole grains (for example, oatmeal and barley), fruits and vegetables, low fat milk products, and wild and lean meats.

Drinking more water:

Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water every day.

Eating more foods that are high in fibre:

Eat foods that have a lot of fibre in them, like whole grain breads and whole grain cereals, dried beans or canned beans, vegetables and fruit.

Eating smaller meals and snacks more often during the day:

Be careful not to turn snacks into meals. Here are some healthy snack ideas:

- ◆ a piece of fruit and a small piece of low fat cheese
- ◆ vegetables and low fat dip
- ◆ a small bowl of soup
- ◆ yogurt
- ◆ a small piece of low fat cheese and a few whole wheat crackers.

Most people need 3 small meals and 2 to 3 healthy snacks every day. During the day, you should eat at least every 6 hours.

Eating less fast food, regular pop, chips and chocolate bars:

Many fast foods have lots of hidden fat in them, so try to cut back on these foods. Drinking regular pop and too much juice between meals will make your blood sugars go up too high. Try eating healthy snacks like fruits and vegetables instead of chips and chocolate bars.

Eating less fat:

If you eat a lot of high-fat foods, you might gain too much weight. This makes it harder for your body to control blood sugar levels.

Choose to eat these foods more often:

- ◆ leaner meats (these can be store bought or traditional)
- ◆ vegetables and fruits
- ◆ whole grain breads and cereals
- ◆ low fat milk and yogurt.

Choose to eat these foods less often:

- ◆ potato chips, cheezies
- ◆ balogna, hot-dogs
- ◆ butter, margarine, lard and oil
- ◆ chocolate bars or desserts.

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Living well with Diabetes: Active Living

If you are physically active, you are less likely to develop type 2 diabetes. Physical activity also helps control blood sugar levels in people who have diabetes. Being active also helps you:

- ◆ deal with life problems (stress) and feel more energetic
- ◆ keep your weight down
- ◆ lower your chances for heart disease (heart disease is a serious problem for people with diabetes, especially if they smoke)
- ◆ tone or build up your muscles

Being more active does not mean that you have to join a gym or work out with weights. You can get regular exercise by going for a walk each day, gardening, picking berries, snowshoeing, swimming or playing with your kids. It is important for you to stay active all year long.

Make sure you don't try to do too much all at once. Do activities that you enjoy. Ask your family and friends to support you. Parents should encourage their children to be active.

Build up your activity slowly — don't forget to listen to your body. You should try to work up to about 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity almost every day. Every minute counts — try doing 10 minutes at a time. If you want more information, take a look at Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living at www.healthcanada.ca/paguide.

It's never too late to get active. Even if you're disabled or injured, activity can help you be more healthy and to feel better.

Remember, you should always talk to your health care provider before you start an activity program or if you need more information.

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Smoking and Diabetes

Some Aboriginal people in Canada use tobacco in ceremonies and in prayer. Smoking cigarettes, however, is not a traditional use of tobacco.

Cigarette smoking causes many health problems. These problems can be even more serious for people with diabetes.

Most people know that smoking causes cancer and breathing problems. But it can also cause other problems, especially if you have diabetes. Because smoking decreases the way blood flows through your body, it increases the chance of long term complications of diabetes including heart disease and amputation.

Here are the facts:

- ◆ When you smoke, less oxygen flows inside your body. This can cause a heart attack or a stroke.
- ◆ Smoking damages your blood vessels, which makes it harder for your body to heal. This can lead to infections in your legs and feet.
- ◆ If you smoke and you have diabetes, you are more likely to get nerve damage and kidney disease.
- ◆ Smokers are more likely to get colds and respiratory infections.
- ◆ Smoking can lead to impotence.
- ◆ Children are more likely to start smoking if their parents smoke.

The good news is that no matter how long you've smoked, your health will start to improve right after you quit or cut down a lot on the amount that you smoke. Kicking the habit is hard to do – but worth it. There are many ways to try to quit.

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