



# TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

## Preventing Type 2 Diabetes

### Steps Toward A Healthier Life

People with diabetes have a problem with blood sugar. Their blood sugar, or blood glucose, can climb too high. Having high levels of sugar in your blood can cause a lot of trouble. Diabetes raises your risk for heart disease, blindness, amputations, and other serious issues. But the most common type of diabetes, called type 2 diabetes, can be prevented or delayed if you know what steps to take.

About 29 million Americans, or nearly 1 in 10 people, have diabetes. Many more have a condition called prediabetes. People with prediabetes usually have no symptoms, yet they're

at risk for eventually developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

Research shows that you can greatly reduce your risk for type 2 diabetes and prediabetes by eating a healthy diet, getting plenty of physical activity, and losing excess weight.

Type 2 diabetes arises because of problems related to a hormone called insulin. When our bodies digest the foods we eat, they're broken down and converted to glucose and other molecules, which then travel through the bloodstream. Insulin signals cells to let glucose in for use as an energy source. When a person has type 2 diabetes, either the body's cells have trouble using insulin, or the body isn't producing enough insulin. As a result, glucose can build up to harmful levels in the blood.

#### Who's At Risk?

Type 2 diabetes occurs most often in people who are middle-aged or older, but younger people can get

it too. "Before the mid- to late-1990s, we almost never saw type 2 diabetes in youth," says Dr. Barbara Linder, an NIH expert on childhood diabetes. But now, type 2 diabetes is becoming more common in young people, alongside increasing rates of childhood obesity.

Some factors that raise people's risk for type 2 diabetes are beyond their control. Having an immediate family member with diabetes increases your risk. Type 2 diabetes is also more common in some races or ethnicities, including African-Americans, Alaska Natives, American Indians, Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Hispanic/Latinos.

People who are overweight, obese, or inactive are also much likelier to develop type 2 diabetes. But these are risk factors that you can change, and doing so will greatly reduce your risk for diabetes.

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## What's The Treatment?

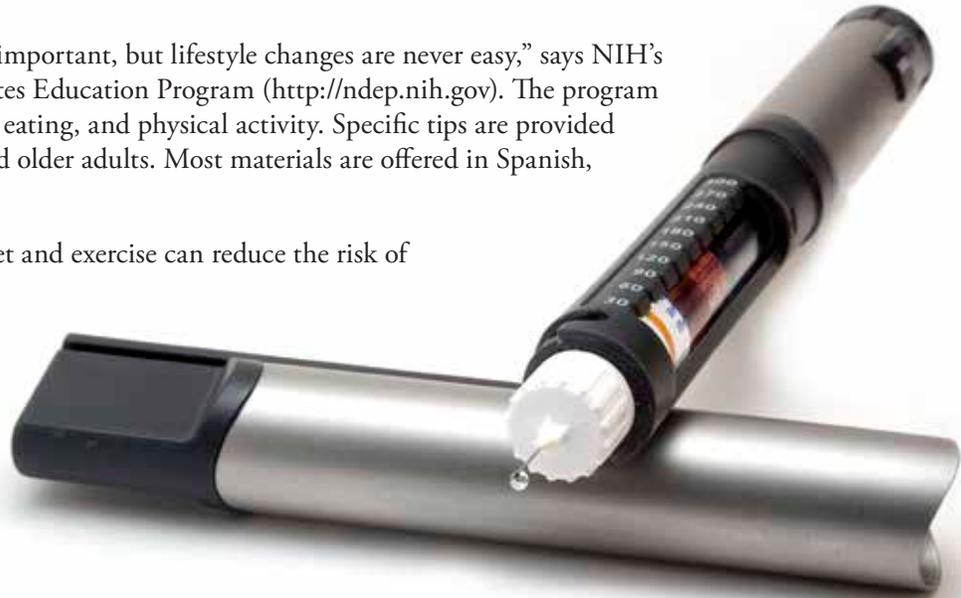
“Weight loss is key, and physical activity is very important, but lifestyle changes are never easy,” says NIH’s Joanne Gallivan, director of the National Diabetes Education Program (<http://ndep.nih.gov>). The program offers resources to help with weight loss, healthy eating, and physical activity. Specific tips are provided for certain groups of people, such as children and older adults. Most materials are offered in Spanish, and some are available in other languages.

As the Diabetes Prevention Program showed, diet and exercise can reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. You’re most likely to succeed at weight loss, Linder says, “if you can find some physical activity that you enjoy and can do every day.”

Experts recommend that people at risk for type 2 diabetes should exercise weekly at moderate intensity for 150 minutes. That’s 30 minutes, 5 times a week.

If you think you might have prediabetes or diabetes, your doctor can help you decide what to do. A blood test called the A1C test can check your average blood glucose level to see if you have prediabetes.

Nathan says that people over 45 should be screened for diabetes, as should other people at increased risk. Risk factors and warning signs for type 2 diabetes include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or a history of gestational diabetes or cardiovascular disease.



## TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT DIABETES

- Move more. Walk, dance, or ride a bike with your friends or family. It doesn’t matter what activity you do, as long as you enjoy it.
- Choose healthy foods. Eat fiber-rich fruits and vegetables.
- Maintain a healthy weight. With healthy eating and more physical activity, you can drop pounds and keep them off.
- Set reasonable goals. Start with small changes, like being active for 15 minutes a day this week. Add 5 minutes per day each week until you’re up to at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week.
- Record your progress. Keep a diary of what you eat and drink and the number of minutes you exercise. It’s a great way to stay focused and reach your goals.
- Keep at it. Making even small changes is hard in the beginning. If you get off track, start again.