

Type 1 Diabetes

What is type 1 diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes is a disease that starts when the pancreas stops making insulin. Insulin lets blood sugar – also called glucose – enter the body’s cells to be used for energy. Without insulin, the cells can’t get the sugar they need, and too much sugar builds up in the blood.

Diabetes can cause sudden or long-term problems. If the body doesn’t have enough insulin and the blood sugar gets very high, a sudden and very serious problem called diabetic ketoacidosis can happen. This can be deadly. Over time, high bloodsugar can damage the eyes, heart, blood vessels, nerves and kidneys.

Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age, but it usually starts in children or young adults. That’s why it used to be called juvenile diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is different than type 2 diabetes, which is the most common form of the illness. In type 1, the body stops making insulin. In type 2, the body does not make enough insulin, or the body can’t use insulin the right way. All people with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin. Some people with type 2 diabetes also need insulin but most people can use diet, exercise and medicine in pills to treat that illness.

There isn’t a cure for type 1 diabetes. But with treatment, people can live long and healthy lives.

What causes type 1 diabetes?

The body makes insulin in beta cells, which are in a part of the pancreas called the islet (say “EYE-let) tissue. Type 1 diabetes starts because the body destroys the beta cells. Experts don’t know why this happens.

Some people have a greater chance of getting type 1 diabetes, because they have a parent, brother, or sister who has it. But most people with the illness don’t have a family history of it.

Other things that increase the risk of getting type 1 diabetes are being white and having islet cell antibodies in the blood.

What are the symptoms of type 1 diabetes?

Symptoms of diabetes are:

- Being very thirsty
- Urinating a lot
- Losing weight without trying
- Being hungrier than usual (sometimes)

These symptoms usually appear over a few days to weeks. Sometimes people notice symptoms after an illness, such as the flu. They may think that the diabetes symptoms are because of the flu, so they don't seek medical care soon enough.

If a person waits too long to get medical care, he or she may get symptoms of diabetic ketoacidosis. Symptoms of this problem include:

- Flushed, hot, dry skin
- Not feeling hungry
- Belly pain
- Vomiting
- A strong, fruity breath odor (similar to nail polish remover)
- Fast and shallow breathing
- Restlessness, drowsiness, or trouble waking up
- Confusion

How is type 1 diabetes diagnosed?

A doctor asks questions about the person's health and does a physical exam. A blood test measures the person's glucose.

Some people are diagnosed with type 1 because they have symptoms of diabetic ketoacidosis.

How is it treated?

Treatment for type 1 diabetes focuses on keeping blood sugar levels as close to the normal range as possible. A person with type 1 diabetes needs to:

Take insulin through daily shots, an insulin pump, or an insulin inhaler.

Eat a healthy diet that spreads carbohydrate throughout the day.

Check blood sugar levels several times a day.

Get regular exercise.

When a small child has diabetes, the parents have the responsibility for blood sugar control. As the child grows, he or she can take over more of the diabetes care.

Treatment may change based on the results of daily home blood sugar tests and other tests or exams.

Can type 1 diabetes be prevented?

There is no way to prevent type 1 diabetes. But studies are being done to find ways to prevent or delay diabetes in people who are most likely to get it.

Tight control of blood sugar and blood pressure can help people with type 1 diabetes prevent or delay problems with their eyes, kidneys, heart, blood vessels, and nerves.