What is Diabetes?

Diabetes causes blood glucose levels to be above normal. People with diabetes have problems converting food to energy. After food is eaten, it is broken down into a sugar called glucose. Glucose is then carried by the blood to cells throughout the body. The hormone insulin, made in the pancreas, helps the body change blood glucose into energy. People with type 2 diabetes make insulin, but less than they need to regulate their blood sugar, and their insulin doesn't work properly. People with type 1 diabetes usually make no insulin.

What are the signs and symptoms of type 2 diabetes?

Many people have no visible signs or symptoms of diabetes. Symptoms can also be so mild that you might not notice them. More than 5 million people in the United States have type 2 diabetes and do not know it.

Look for:

- increased thirst
- increased hunger
- fatigue
- unexplained weight loss
- blurred vision
- sores that do not heal
- increased urination, especially at night

What does pre-diabetes mean?

Pre-diabetes means your blood glucose is higher than normal but not high enough for a
diagnosis of diabetes. When you have pre-diabetes, you’re at risk of getting type 2 diabetes and heart disease. There are no visible symptoms of pre-diabetes. The good news is, if you have pre-diabetes, you can lower your risk of getting diabetes. With shifts in eating patterns and moderate physical activity you may even return to having normal blood glucose levels.

**What factors increase my risk for type 2 diabetes?**

If you have certain conditions, you’re more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. The more of these conditions you have, the higher your risk. Check each item that is true for you. Then show this list to your doctor.

- My mother had diabetes when I was born.
- I have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes.
- My family background is African American, American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander.
- I have had gestational diabetes, or I gave birth to at least one baby weighing more than 9 pounds.
- My blood pressure is 140/90 or higher, or I have been told that I have high blood pressure.
- My cholesterol levels are higher than normal. My HDL cholesterol (?good? cholesterol) is below 35, or my triglyceride level is above 250.
- I am fairly inactive. I exercise fewer than three times a week.

**How can I lower my risk for diabetes?**

Small steps can lead to big rewards.

- Focus on living a healthy lifestyle.
- Make wise food choices most of the time by eating lots of veggies and fruits. Try the [plate method](#)!
- Be physically active every day. Try walking to class instead of taking the bus, using a [walk as a study break](#), dancing around your room, or taking a fitness class at the Student Rec Center or Rams Head.
- Take your prescribed medicines.
Doing these small nutritional steps can reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Keeping your blood pressure and cholesterol on target also helps you stay healthy.

1. Watch portion sizes! Keep in mind that many of the foods we are served are greatly oversized.
2. Eat mindfully and slowly, learning to fully enjoy the eating experience, rather than focusing on getting the next bite.
3. Wait 20 minutes before even considering additional portions of food. This is the length of time it takes for the brain to receive the message that food is on the way.
4. Include generous servings of vegetables daily. A minimum of 3 to 5 servings per day is recommended.
5. Watch what you drink. Sweetened sodas, juices and fruit flavored drinks are concentrated sources of sugar and calories. It’s so easy to swallow hundreds of calories without even realizing it.
6. Reduce your consumption of fatty and deep fried foods. Instead, try veggie burgers, lean meats, poultry, fish, legumes and low fat dairy products. Remember?according to the Diabetes Prevention Program, a recent landmark clinical study, ?Lifestyle changes are important and such changes CAN be made?.

National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) [4]
National Diabetes Prevention Program [5]
Nutrition [6]
Nutrition Services [7]

Source URL: https://campushealth.unc.edu/health-topics/nutrition/tips-prevent-type-2-diabetes

Links
[6] https://campushealth.unc.edu/health-topics/nutrition
[7] https://campushealth.unc.edu/services/nutrition-services