Diabetes

**Diabetes is a lifelong condition that causes a person's blood sugar level to become too high.**

There are two main types of diabetes – [type 1 diabetes](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Diabetes-type1/Pages/Introduction.aspx) and [type 2 diabetes](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Diabetes-type2/Pages/Introduction.aspx).

Type 2 diabetes is far more common than type 1. In the UK, around 90% of all adults with diabetes have type 2.

There are 3.9 million people living with diabetes in the UK. That's more than one in 16 people in the UK who has diabetes (diagnosed or undiagnosed).

This figure has nearly trebled since 1996, when there were 1.4 million. By 2025, it is estimated that 5 million people will have diabetes in the UK.

Many more people have blood sugar levels above the normal range, but not high enough to be diagnosed as having diabetes.

This is sometimes known as prediabetes. If your blood sugar level is above the normal range, your risk of developing full-blown diabetes is increased.

It's very important for diabetes to be diagnosed as early as possible because it will get progressively worse if left untreated.

When to see a doctor

You should therefore visit your GP as soon as possible if you have symptoms, such as feeling thirsty, passing urine more often than usual, and feeling tired all the time.

Symptoms of diabetes

The main symptoms of diabetes are:

* feeling very [thirsty](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/thirst/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
* urinating more frequently than usual, particularly at night
* feeling very tired
* weight loss and loss of muscle bulk
* itching around the penis or vagina, or frequent episodes of [thrush](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Thrush/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
* cuts or wounds that heal slowly
* blurred vision

Type 1 diabetes can develop quickly over weeks or even days.

Many people have type 2 diabetes for years without realising because the early symptoms tend to be general.



What causes diabetes?

The amount of sugar in the blood is controlled by a hormone called insulin, which is produced by the pancreas (a gland behind the stomach).

When food is digested and enters your bloodstream, insulin moves glucose out of the blood and into cells, where it's broken down to produce energy.

However, if you have diabetes, your body is unable to break down glucose into energy. This is because there's either not enough insulin to move the glucose, or the insulin produced doesn't work properly.

Type 1 diabetes

In type 1 diabetes, the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin. As no insulin is produced, your glucose levels increase, which can seriously damage the body's organs.

Type 1 diabetes is often known as insulin-dependent diabetes. It's also sometimes known as juvenile diabetes or early-onset diabetes because it usually develops before the age of 40, often during the teenage years.

Type 1 diabetes is less common than type 2 diabetes. In the UK, it affects about 10% of all adults with diabetes.

If you're diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, you'll need insulin injections for the rest of your life.

You'll also need to pay close attention to certain aspects of your lifestyle and health to ensure your blood glucose levels stay balanced.

For example, you'll need to [eat healthily](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx), take [regular exercise](http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Fitness/Pages/Fitnesshome.aspx) and carry out regular blood tests.

Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is where the body doesn't produce enough insulin, or the body's cells don't react to insulin. This is known as insulin resistance.

If you're diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, you may be able to control your symptoms simply by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and monitoring your blood glucose levels.

However, as type 2 diabetes is a progressive condition, you may eventually need medication, usually in the form of tablets.

Type 2 diabetes is often associated with [obesity](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Obesity/Pages/Introduction.aspx). Obesity-related diabetes is sometimes referred to as maturity-onset diabetes because it's more common in older people.

Diabetic eye screening

Everyone with diabetes aged 12 or over should be invited to have their eyes screened once a year.

If you have diabetes, your eyes are at risk from diabetic retinopathy.

Screening, which involves a half-hour check to examine the back of the eyes, is a way of detecting the condition early so it can be treated more effectively.