

# Make Health a **Social** Affair



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*diabetes*

## Make Health a Social Affair

Social occasions such as parties and family reunions are fun times, and they offer a chance to catch up with each other, talk about old times, honor traditions, sample favorite recipes, and enjoy being together. And while you're all together at such an event, it's also a great opportunity to talk about each other's health needs.

This brochure will help you talk to your loved ones about diabetes and its complications. It is important to talk about the risk factors, the need to get tested, and the treatments that are available. These approaches are only suggestions. Feel free to present the information in a way that's comfortable for you and interesting for your family members and friends. Sharing this information can go a long way toward helping ensure that your loved ones enjoy many more gatherings and good times to come.

*Use time together at social events to show you care about your loved ones' health*



## What is diabetes?

Diabetes means that the amount of glucose (sugar) in your blood is too high. That's why people sometimes call diabetes "sugar" or "sweet blood." Your blood always has some glucose in it because your body needs glucose for energy. But too much of it in the blood isn't good for your health.

Diabetes can lead to serious health problems and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to control the disease and lower the risk of damaging their kidneys, eyes, nerves, and gums and teeth.

## There are 2 common types:

**Type 1 diabetes**, formerly called juvenile diabetes, is usually first diagnosed in children, teenagers, or young adults. People with type 1 diabetes make no insulin and must take insulin every day. Insulin helps sugar from food get into your cells.

**Type 2 diabetes**, formerly called adult-onset diabetes, is the most common type of diabetes. With type 2 diabetes, the body does not make or use insulin well. People with type 2 diabetes often need to follow a healthy diet plan, get regular exercise, and take pills and/or insulin. Being overweight and inactive increases the chances of developing type 2 diabetes.



## Am I at risk for diabetes?

You have a higher chance of getting diabetes if you:

- Are age 45 or older
- Are overweight
- Are African American, Hispanic, Asian American or Pacific Islander, or American Indian
- Have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes
- Have high blood pressure (above 140/90)
- Have low HDL (good cholesterol) and high levels of blood fats
- Had diabetes when pregnant, or gave birth to baby over 9 pounds
- Are physically active less than 3 times a week

## How do I know if I have diabetes?

You may have one or more of the warning signs below, or you may have no signs at all. Talk to your health care provider about getting a blood test to check your glucose levels to know if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes (a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes). Only your health care provider can diagnose diabetes. The signs of diabetes are:

- Being very thirsty
- Urinating often
- Feeling very hungry or tired
- Losing weight without trying
- Having sores that heal slowly
- Having dry, itchy skin
- Losing the feeling or having tingling in your feet
- Having blurry eyesight

## What can I do to control or reduce my risk of developing diabetes?\*

Managing diabetes requires effort every day to eat healthy foods, be physically active, take diabetes medicine as prescribed, and test blood glucose levels. You can take steps to reduce your risk of developing other health problems diabetes can cause over the years by keeping your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol under control. If you have diabetes, work with your health care provider to create a plan for managing your health.

You can do a lot to lower your chances of getting diabetes. Some tips are:

- Be physically active on a regular basis
- Eat less fat and fewer calories
- Lose weight if you need to

Lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels also helps you stay healthy. Talk to your health care provider to make a plan to lessen your risk and improve your health.

\*This health information is being provided for general educational purposes only. Your health care provider is the single best source of information regarding your health. Please consult your health care provider if you have any questions about your health.



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## Tips for approaching loved ones about their health

Sometimes it can be awkward talking to friends and family members one-on-one about personal health issues. Keep these tips in mind when approaching someone at risk:

- Familiarize yourself with the facts in this brochure.
- Ask permission to have the conversation, and choose the right time and environment. A quiet, private place that is free from distractions is best.
- If your loved ones are not comfortable talking about their health, don't force a discussion. Express your feelings of concern. Let them know that you'll be ready to talk whenever they are.
- Acknowledge that it's not always easy to face our personal health problems. Emphasize that the final decision to talk to the health care provider is theirs.
- Be supportive and listen. Offer to help them find more information.
- Offer to go with them to the health care provider.



## Encourage your relatives and friends to look out for one another

### Designate health buddies

Designate a “health buddy” for each of your family members and friends. Once everyone is paired up, ask them to exchange contact information. Then ask everyone to commit to follow up with their health buddy at some point over the next 3 months to check on his or her health. Encourage them to continue to follow up with each other, especially those who have diabetes risk factors or other illnesses.

### Create a follow-up list of loved ones at risk

If your family or social circle is one that talks openly about their personal health conditions, you may already know who has one or more diabetes risk factors. Make a list of these people and collect their contact information. Then follow up with a call, e-mail, letter, or visit sometime over the next 3 months to again encourage them to talk to their health care provider about whether they are at risk of developing diabetes. A friendly reminder gives you and others a chance to express any concerns, and it may be just what is needed for someone at risk to take the next step.