

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition in which the amount of glucose (sugar) in the body is too high because the body cannot use it properly.

It may be due to lack or inappropriate action of insulin (a hormone) that the body uses to transport glucose to the cells where it is turned into energy.

Who Develops Diabetes? And what are risk factors?

Anyone can develop diabetes; however, people who have close relatives with the disease are somewhat likely to also develop the disease.

Other factors include:

- Obesity and overweight;
- High blood cholesterol; and
- Lack of physical activity.

The risk of developing diabetes also increases as people grow older.

Pregnancy increases the risk of developing the disease (gestational diabetes), which can later in life develop into full blown diabetes.

What Causes Diabetes?

High level of glucose in the blood can be caused by:

The amount of insulin produced by the body not being enough to burn down the sugar in the body;

The body does not produce insulin at all;

Cells responsible for insulin activity are not responding properly.

Other causes include:

- Endocrine diseases;
- Use of some drugs; and
- Excessive alcohol consumption.

Are there Different Types of Diabetes?

There are two types of diabetes:

Type 1 Diabetes

The body does not produce insulin.

People with Type 1 Diabetes must take insulin injections daily in order to survive.

This type of Diabetes is most common in children or young adults but can also occur at any age. This is commonly referred to as *insulin-dependent* Diabetes Mellitus.

Type 2 Diabetes

More common than type one Diabetes; it commonly affects people who are over 40 years of age, overweight, and have a family history of Diabetes;

Results when the body does not produce enough insulin and/or is unable to use insulin properly.

This type is commonly referred to as *non-insulin-dependent* Diabetes Mellitus.

Pregnancy Associated Diabetes

Diabetes may develop in pregnant women who have never had the disease before;

It may precede development of Type 2 Diabetes.

This type is commonly referred to as *Gestational* Diabetes.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes?

The following are some of the signs and symptoms of Diabetes:

Unusual thirst;

Increased frequency of urination;

Unusual weight loss;

Extreme hunger;

Vision becomes blurred;

Slow-healing wounds;

Erectile dysfunction;

Irritability;

Tingling or numbness on the hands or feet; and

Extreme unexplained fatigue.

How can I know that I have Diabetes?

By a simple blood test where the glucose level is measured.

Usually, these tests are repeated on the subsequent day to confirm the diagnosis. **The normal ranges are:**

Random blood glucose (3.9–7.8 mmol/l)

Fasting blood glucose (3.9–6.1 mmol/l).

How Does Diabetes affect my Body?

Immediate effects:

Low or high blood sugar than normal can lead to loss of consciousness, coma and sudden death.

Long standing/late effects:

Poorly controlled blood glucose has effects in the body; the following organs/systems are mostly likely to be affected:

Kidney: Kidney failure.

Eyes: Blindness.

Heart: Hypertension, Stroke.

Nerves: Loss of sensation, recurrent unnoticed injury especially on the legs and impotence (erectile dysfunction).

Skin/musculoskeletal system: Recurrent infections on the skin, chest, mucus membrane, and chronic ulcers/wounds. This can result into amputation of the limb.

How can I Prevent Diabetes?

Lifestyle changes can prevent or delay the onset of Type 2 Diabetes in those adults who are at high risk of getting the disease.

Take a Healthy Diet

Take diet which is rich in nutrients, fibre and low in fat and calories, with an emphasis on fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and legumes (beans, peas and lentils);

Avoid high-fat dairy products and animal proteins; and

Avoid sugars (simple carbohydrates) use sugar-free sweetener.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Being overweight increases the risk of developing diabetes.

Be Physically Active

Exercise regularly to lose weight and improve blood sugar use; exercise for at least 30 minutes daily.

Limit Alcohol Consumption

Taking too much alcohol may result in overweight and development of Diabetes.

Stop Smoking !

What should I Do if Lifestyle Modification is not Working?

Consult a physician; there is a wide range of effective drugs for treatment which can control your blood sugar.

Things I should Remember

Diabetes is a silent killer; regular check-up is very important.

For further information, please contact:

University Health Centre

Tel. General: 2410500-8 Ext. 2006

Direct: 2410014

E-mail: healthcentre@udsm.ac.tz

Website: <http://www.udsm.ac.tz>

Photo credit: UDSM Health Centre
Design & Production: KAD Associates



**UNIVERSITY OF
DAR ES SALAAM**

**HEALTH CENTRE
P.O. Box 35074 DAR ES SALAAM**



BASIC FACTS ABOUT DIABETES

'A Healthy Mind Thrives in a Healthy Body'