

Diabetes in Kentucky

General Diabetes Information

In 2005, approximately 8.9 percent of Kentucky's adult population had been diagnosed with **diabetes**. **Diabetes** is the number one cause of disability for Kentuckians and the fifth leading cause of death by disease. Among the 50 states, Kentucky ranks seventh for having the highest number in the adult population diagnosed with **diabetes**. The cost of **diabetes** in both life and medical care is alarming. In 2002 approximately 2.9 billion dollars was spent on treating **diabetes** in Kentucky. Preventing this catastrophic disease is a priority. An estimated 40.1 percent of Kentuckians (adults aged 40 to 74) have pre-diabetes and may develop type 2 **diabetes** within 10 years if they do not change lifestyle habits. Identifying those at risk for **diabetes** is one of the keys to reducing both the disease and cost of this disease in Kentucky.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a group of chronic, metabolic diseases that result in high levels of glucose (sugar) in the blood. These high levels of sugar can also spill over into the urine. This is a disease resulting from the body's inability to use and/or produce **insulin**. **Insulin** is a hormone that helps the glucose in the blood enter the body's cells, where it is either used immediately for energy or stored for later use. Without **insulin**, the blood glucose builds up in the bloodstream and cause damage to the heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, and nerves. **Diabetes** is a systemic disease, meaning it can affect many body systems. There are three major types of **diabetes**: type 1, type 2, and gestational. These series of fact sheets will address three types of **diabetes**, provide signs and symptoms of **diabetes**, give risk factors for **diabetes**, and provide tips for prevention of **diabetes**. Pre-diabetes will also be discussed.

What are the signs and symptoms of diabetes?

- Frequent urination (having to go to the bathroom more often than usual for no apparent reason).
- Excessive thirst (even after drinking an adequate amount).
- Fatigue (feeling tired).
- Extreme hunger (when you normally should not be hungry).
- Unusual weight loss (not explained by dieting or increased physical activity).
- Blurred vision resulting from fluid leaking into the lens of the eye from elevated blood glucose. This condition causes the lens of the eye to swell making it unable to focus properly. This condition may occur at the onset of diabetes or during periods when blood glucose fluctuates. It passes with time or when blood glucose levels decrease.
- Dry, itchy skin.
- Tingling or numbness in feet (may be a sign of damage to the blood vessels or nerves in your feet due to undiagnosed or untreated **diabetes**).

These signs and symptoms may indicate **diabetes** (although you may have no signs and symptoms). Your health care provider is the **ONLY ONE** who can make the diagnosis. **DO NOT** rely on symptoms only.

Complications of diabetes

The commonly recognized complications include:

Heart and blood vessel disease

- Is the leading cause of death in **diabetes**.
- May also result in high blood pressure and stroke.
- Can also cause damage to the blood vessels, especially in lower legs and feet.
- **Atherosclerosis** or thickening of arteries.

Kidney disease (nephropathy)

- Most common cause of end-stage kidney disease.

Nerve disease

- Damage to the nerves, especially in the lower legs and feet. It is the most common cause of non-injury amputation in those areas.

Skin diseases

- Diabetic **dermopathy** or light brown scaly patches on the skin due to changes in the small blood vessels in the skin. Seen most often on the front of legs (one or both). Do not cause pain, itching, or skin breakdown.
- **Stye** (infection in the glands of the eyelid).
- Boils.
- Infections of hair follicles.
- Athlete's foot.
- Ringworm.
- Vaginal infections that cause itching.
- Generalized skin itching.

Gum/oral disease

- Tooth decay.
- **Periodontal** (gum) disease.
- Taste impairment.
- Poor functioning of salivary glands (glands that secrete saliva in the mouth).

What are the risk factors for diabetes?

Being:

- Overweight.
- Over 45 years of age.
- Physically inactive.
- A member of high risk ethnic group (African-American, American Indian, Hispanic, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander).

Having:

- A family history of **diabetes** (mother, father, brother, sister, or grandparents).
- An **HDL** (good cholesterol) less than 35.
- **Triglycerides** greater than 250.
- A history of pre-diabetes.
- Conditions associated with insulin resistance such as **polycystic ovary syndrome** and **acanthosis nigricans** (a skin condition that commonly occurs around the neck or in skin folds and appears thick and dark).
- Or had a history of vascular disease.

Had:

- **Diabetes** during pregnancy and/or baby greater than 9 pounds.

How to prevent diabetes?

- Know your risk factors.
- Modest weight loss (5 to 7 percent).
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Change your eating habits by making healthier choices. Eat more fruits and vegetables and eat fewer foods high in fat.
- Increase physical activity. If you are not currently in a physical activity program, begin one. Get up and get moving. Participate in 30 minutes of physical activity every day. It is important to check with your doctor before beginning a physical activity program.
- Have regular doctor checkups.

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This is a publication in a five-part series on diabetes. Other publications in this series are:

- Pre-diabetes: HSW-PAR.815
- Type 1 diabetes: HSW-PAR.816
- Type 2 diabetes: HSW-PAR.817
- Gestational diabetes: HSW-PAR.818

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