

could you have diabetes and not know it?

Millions do, but the symptoms aren't always obvious. How to know if you should get checked.

BY BARBARA BRODY



Sugary foods don't cause diabetes, but they can lead to weight gain, which in turn increases your type 2 diabetes risk.

not exercising. Supersize portions. Our love affair with food has taken a drastic turn. The number of Americans with type 2 diabetes—21 million, including adults and children—has risen with the obesity epidemic. Should you or your child get tested? Yes, if you have a family history of the disease and/or any of the following:

► **YOU'RE OVERWEIGHT** Even being just 10 to 15 pounds overweight can increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. If your child is overweight, make sure his pediatrician tests him, because type 2 diabetes is on the rise in kids. The encouraging news is that losing just 5% to 7% of your body weight can reduce your risk of diabetes, according to research from the Diabetes Prevention Program.

Testing usually involves screening your blood for high glucose (sugar) levels. If they're too high, you could have either type 1 or type 2. (See box, *right*, for explanations of the two types.) Your doctor will most likely be able to sort it out based on your age and symptoms. In some cases, you may also need to see an endocrinologist (specialist).

► **YOU'RE CONSTANTLY RUNNING TO THE BATHROOM** "If your body doesn't make enough insulin [a hormone that carries glucose into your cells to give them energy]," which can happen with

type 1 or type 2 diabetes, “glucose builds up in your bloodstream and comes out in your urine,” explains Janet Silverstein, MD, chief of pediatric endocrinology at the University of Florida. Because you’re urinating a lot, you’ll probably also be very thirsty and drinking more than usual.

➔ **YOUR VISION IS BLURRY** High blood sugar levels cause glucose to build up in the lens of your eyes,

making it harder for you to focus. This could mean that you have type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

➔ **YOU’RE LOSING WEIGHT FOR NO APPARENT REASON** This is usually a sign of type 1 diabetes, but it sometimes happens with type 2. When the body can’t make insulin, glucose (sugar) from food can’t be used by the body’s cells for energy or stored, says Dr. Silverstein. In addition, fat starts to break down, making you lose more weight.

➔ **THERE’S A DARK RING AROUND YOUR NECK** When your body starts pumping out too much insulin—which is common with type 2—receptors in the skin folds respond by making extra pigment, says Alyne Ricker, MD, pediatric endocrinologist at Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston.

➔ **YOU’RE GETTING FREQUENT YEAST INFECTIONS** This can happen with type 1 or type 2, because a buildup of glucose can cause an overgrowth

TURN OFF THE TUBE, LOWER YOUR RISK

People who watch more than 2 hours of TV per day are significantly more likely to develop type 2 diabetes, possibly because they’re not getting enough exercise.

Source: *The Journal of the American Medical Association*

of yeast. Symptoms often include vaginal itching and thick discharge. Keep in mind that young children might instead get a diaper rash, and boys might get urethritis, a yeast infection of the urethra.

➔ **YOU’RE 45 OR OLDER** Diabetes risk goes up with age, so the American Diabetes Association recommends getting screened at least every three years starting at age 45. Learn more at NDEP.nih.gov. ✱

IT’S AMERICAN DIABETES MONTH. Visit diabetes.org to learn more about how to lower your risk.

diabetes defined

TYPE 1 An autoimmune condition in which the body doesn’t make insulin, a hormone needed to move sugar from the bloodstream into cells for energy. Usually diagnosed in kids.

TYPE 2 The most common type in adults: You don’t make enough insulin or the body doesn’t respond to it properly. Not an autoimmune condition, it’s strongly linked to obesity because fat cells are more resistant to insulin.



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I reversed type 2 diabetes!
”

LINDA FISTEL, 62, of Swampscott, MA, proves just how powerful diet and exercise can be.

Diabetic forever?
“When I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 10 years ago, I was overweight. I tried dieting and exercising, but it never seemed to make a difference. I assumed I’d always be diabetic. Then my doctor encouraged me to join Why WAIT? [Weight Achievement and Intensive Treatment], a program at Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston.”

Instant results
“I had exercised before, but I never knew exactly how it affected my blood sugar. When the experts at Why WAIT? coached me to check my blood sugar more often and I saw how it dropped immediately after exercising, that motivated me to keep going. I started walking for an hour a day on my treadmill, biking or doing the Wii Fit Plus.”

I can eat carbs!
“I used to avoid both carbs and fat, but I found out that you need some of each, plus protein, to lose weight and keep your blood sugar levels down. It’s all about eating the right combinations and smaller portions. Now I eat less but more often—six times a day—which keeps my blood sugar from going too high or low.”

Diabetic no more
“In just 13 weeks I lost 23 pounds, and now I have so much more energy. The best part is how these changes have impacted my A1c level [a measure of blood sugar]. It’s now 5.3%, which is normal—my doctor said I don’t even have prediabetes anymore! I’m determined to keep up these healthy habits so that I never have to deal with diabetes again.”