What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disorder of metabolism—the way our bodies use digested food for growth and energy. Most of the food we eat is broken down into glucose. Glucose is a form of sugar in the blood that provides energy to all your body's cells. You could say it's your body's favorite fuel.

After digestion, glucose passes into the bloodstream, where it is used by cells for growth and energy. For glucose to get into cells, insulin must be present. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas, a large gland located behind the stomach.

When we eat, the pancreas automatically produces the right amount of insulin to move glucose from blood into our cells. In people with diabetes, however, the pancreas either produces little or no insulin, or the cells do not respond appropriately to the insulin that is produced. Glucose builds up in the blood, overflows into the urine, and passes out of the body. Thus, the body loses its main source of fuel even though the blood contains large amounts of glucose.

Sources:

National Institutes of Health - http://health.nih.gov/

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases - http://www.niddk.nih.gov/

World Health Organization – http://www.who.int/

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Who Gets Diabetes?

Diabetes doesn't discriminate. Worldwide, there are approximately 150 million people living with diabetes including infants, the elderly, the poor, the wealthy, celebrities, athletes and politicians. Even some doctors who treat diabetes have diabetes.

Diabetes is not contagious. People cannot "catch" it from each other like a cold or the flu. However, certain factors can increase the risk of developing diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes occurs equally among males and females, but is more common in whites than in nonwhites. Data from the World Health Organization's Multinational Project for Childhood Diabetes indicate that Type 1 diabetes is rare in most African, American Indian, and Asian populations. However, some northern European countries, including Finland and Sweden, have high rates of Type 1 diabetes. The reasons for these differences are unknown.

Type 2 diabetes is more common in older people, especially in people who are overweight, and occurs more often in these cultural groups:

- **African Americans** are 1.6 times as likely to have diabetes than white persons of the same age
- **American Indians** have one of the highest rates of diabetes in the world. On average, American Indians and Alaska Natives are 2.2 times as likely to have diabetes as white persons of similar age
- **Hispanic Americans** are 1.5 times as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic whites of similar age.
- Although prevalence data for diabetes among **Asian Americans** and **Pacific Islanders** are limited, some groups, such as **Native Hawaiians** and **Japanese** and **Filipino residents of Hawaii** aged 20 or older, are about twice as likely to have diabetes as white residents of Hawaii of similar age.

The already-high incidence of diabetes in the United States is likely to increase for several reasons. First, a large segment of the population is aging. Also, Hispanic Americans and other minority groups make up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population. Finally, Americans are increasingly overweight and sedentary. According to recent estimates, diabetes is predicted to affect 8.9 percent of the U.S. population by 2025.

Many times, diabetes can be prevented with a few healthier lifestyle changes like eating healthy, staying active and maintaining a normal weight. To find out more about diabetes prevention, visit anthem.com/ca.

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National Institutes of Health - http://health.nih.gov/

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases - http://www.niddk.nih.gov/

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