



# Understanding Diabetes

## What is diabetes?

- Diabetes means that your blood sugar is too high. Your body changes most of the food you eat into sugar. But too much sugar in the blood is not good for your health.
- Insulin helps the sugar from food get into body cells. If your body does not make enough insulin or the insulin does not work right, the sugar can't get into the cells, so it stays in the blood. This makes your blood sugar level high, causing you to have diabetes.

## Am I at risk for diabetes?

Things that can put you at risk for diabetes:

- Age: Although a person of any age can have diabetes, it is most common in people older than 45.
- Being overweight
- Having a baby that weighs over 9 pounds at birth
- Family History: Having a mother, father, brother, or sister with diabetes
- Race/ethnicity: If your family background is African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, American Indian, Alaska Native, or Pacific Islander
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Exercising less than 3 times a week
- Having a history of heart disease or stroke

## What are the signs of diabetes?

If you have one or more of these signs, see your doctor.

- Being very thirsty
- Urinating a lot
- Feeling very hungry
- Feeling very tired
- Losing weight without trying
- Having sores that are slow to heal
- Having dry, itchy skin
- Losing feeling in or having tingling in the hands or feet
- Having blurred vision
- Having more infections than usual

## How can I take care of myself if I have diabetes?

Many people with diabetes can live healthy and full lives. You can too by following your doctor's orders and remember the following advice:

- Diet: It is important for you to limit the fatty foods that you eat such as fried food. It is also important to eat more whole grain foods, fruits and vegetables,
- Weight Control: If you loose weight, it can improve your blood sugar level.
- Exercise: If you walk or do other exercise for at least 30 minutes at least three times a week, you can improve your blood sugar level.
- Keep track of your blood sugar levels.

**For information from the American Diabetes Association in English or Spanish, call 1-800-DIABETES or visit [www.stopdiabetes.com](http://www.stopdiabetes.com).**