



# Diabetes in Six Easy Lessons

Your doctor or health care provider just told that you that you have diabetes. Although he or she probably talked a lot about what diabetes means and what happens next, you may not remember much after the words "You have diabetes." This is what you need to know:

1. Sugar is the fuel that your body uses to make energy. Just like gasoline won't keep your car running if it isn't pumped into the tank, your cells cannot make energy unless sugar is carried from the blood into your cells. Insulin's job is to move sugar from the bloodstream into the cells.
2. Having diabetes is not your fault. You have been "programmed" to be at risk for diabetes, just like you were "programmed" to have brown or blue eyes, or to be short or tall. Your insulin has trouble moving the sugar from your bloodstream into your cells- so the sugar builds up in your blood. This is called insulin resistance. For years, your pancreas has been able to make extra insulin so that some of it was able to work and your blood sugars stayed normal.

The problem is your pancreas can't keep making extra insulin forever. When it starts to run out, your blood sugar starts to go up. When your blood sugar goes up above normal , you're diagnosed with diabetes.

3. Your pancreas is still working, and you're still making insulin. So every treatment for diabetes is going to try and make your insulin's job easier, so you won't have to make as much.
  - ❖ **Diet:** There really is no such thing as a diabetes diet. What you need to know is that the main type of food that affects your blood sugar is called carbohydrate. Carbohydrate is anything sweet or starchy, and it's the total amount, not where it comes from, that you need to watch. Protein and fat should balance the carbohydrate, but don't affect the blood sugar directly. A diabetes educator or a dietitian can help guide you to understand how much carbohydrate is right for you, and how to plan meals to include your favorite foods.
  - ❖ **Exercise** helps your insulin work better, and the better it works, the less extra you need to make, and the better your sugar is controlled.
  - ❖ **Weight loss:** Fat cells make chemicals that block the action of insulin. Losing weight can help your insulin work better.
  - ❖ **Medical treatment:** There are pills that help your body make more insulin, help the insulin work better, slow down the absorption of carbohydrates, and/or balance other hormones that also affect your sugar level. The pills only work as long as you're making enough insulin to work with. Sometimes they're not strong enough, and you need to take insulin.
4. The kinds of complications you've heard about or seen- problems with the eyes, kidneys, nerves, and heart are caused by the effect of high blood sugar on blood vessels. They can become clogged or broken. If you have diabetes but your blood sugar is well-controlled, you will reduce the risk of these health problems. Your health care provider will teach you how and when to test your blood sugar at home. This will help you know how your treatment plan is working and if it needs to be changed.
5. There are other conditions that can also hurt your blood vessels. These include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, cigarette smoking and being overweight. Your provider will also help you with these conditions in order to keep you healthy.
6. Because you are related, your children and other family members are also, at risk to get diabetes. Good habits (eating healthy and being active) can help prevent them from getting diabetes. It's a "family affair", and everyone can benefit from the changes you'll be making.

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