

## Where can you get the added care you may need?

If you have diabetes, depending on your particular circumstances and needs, there are several clinical alternatives designed to provide you with continuing health care services and support. These programs offer a coordinated team of healthcare professionals including skilled nurses, dietitians, social workers and therapists, all working with your doctor to make sure you get the proper care for your condition.

- ▶ **Skilled Nursing Facilities** provide services to people who need long-term, 24-hour care and supervision. Many of these facilities have diabetes management programs that provide specialized care for the advanced stages of the disease and also treat diabetes-related complications.
- ▶ **Assisted Living Facilities** are designed for those who require some help with activities of daily living but wish to live as independently as possible. In addition to providing residents with comfortable rooms and prepared meals, the facilities provide assistance with such activities as bathing, dressing, laundry, and medication management for people with diabetes and other on-going health problems.
- ▶ **Short-Term Rehabilitation Facilities** offer specialized care and services, usually during the transition between hospital and home or alternate level of care. Length of stay ranges from several days to several months, depending on the patient's condition and his or her ability to function successfully. Amputations, stroke and heart disease are some of the diabetes-related complications that may be stabilized or improved through rehabilitation therapies and treatment.

## What are the warning signs?

Many people with diabetes experience some of the following symptoms:

- ▶ Frequent urination
- ▶ Excessive thirst
- ▶ Unexplained weight loss
- ▶ Extreme hunger
- ▶ Sudden vision changes
- ▶ Tingling or numbness in hands or feet
- ▶ Feeling tired often
- ▶ Sores that heal slowly or won't heal
- ▶ More infections than usual

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, be sure to notify your doctor immediately.



For more information call:

American Diabetes Association  
1-800-DIABETES  
(342-2383)  
www.diabetes.org

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  
1-877-CDC-DIAB  
(232-3422)  
www.cdc.gov/diabetes

National Diabetes Education Program  
1-800-438-5383  
www.ndep.nih.gov

National Diabetes Information  
Clearinghouse  
1-800-860-8747

To order additional complimentary copies of this brochure call us at **540-444-0144.**

*The Richfield Senior Education Initiative is a community service program sponsored by Richfield Retirement Community. In keeping with our not-for-profit mission, the Initiative offers helpful information and support, free of charge, to area seniors and their families through the distribution of educational materials and sponsorship of community events.*

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# Diabetes and Older Adults



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## What is diabetes?

*Diabetes mellitus* is a group of diseases characterized by high levels of blood glucose (sugar) that result from defects in the way insulin is produced and used by the body. What this means is that when we eat food, it is turned into glucose for our bodies to use as energy. The pancreas then produces a hormone called insulin to help get the glucose into our cells. If a person is diabetic, his or her body cannot make enough insulin or use the insulin that it does make effectively. This causes the glucose to build up in the body, resulting in a variety of serious and often life-threatening conditions.

## Who is affected?

Diabetes occurs in every age group, from young children to the elderly. In adults over 65, nearly one in five have the disease. Once a person is diagnosed, it is very important that he or she learn how to manage and control the disease. That's because diabetes, like all chronic conditions, will get progressively worse and lead to serious health complications unless it is properly treated. Although diabetes cannot be cured, it can be controlled. The key to success rests in early detection, proper medical care and lifestyle changes.



## What are the risk factors?

There are several well-established risk factors associated with diabetes, including:

- ▶ Excessive weight
- ▶ Inclusion in a high risk group (African-American, Asian, Hispanic or American Indian)
- ▶ Family history of diabetes
- ▶ High cholesterol
- ▶ Heart conditions
- ▶ History of diabetes during pregnancy
- ▶ Lack of exercise or physical activity
- ▶ High Blood Pressure

If you have any of these risk factors, you should ask your doctor to test you for diabetes.

## What complications are caused by diabetes?

Diabetes has a dramatic impact on many of the chronic health conditions that affect older adults. Some of these conditions may be developed earlier in life or become more serious because of diabetes.

**Heart Disease** - Adults with diabetes have heart disease death rates that are two to four times higher than those without the disease. In fact, heart disease is the leading cause of death among diabetics.

**High Blood Pressure** - Almost two out of every three people who have diabetes also have high blood pressure.

**Stroke** - The risk of having a stroke is two to four times higher for diabetics.

**Kidney Disease** - People with diabetes account for approximately 40 percent of all deaths from kidney disease.

**Amputation** - The majority of all lower limb amputations in the U.S. are performed on people who have diabetes.

People with uncontrolled diabetes are also more susceptible to infectious diseases such as pneumonia or the flu. They often have trouble with sores that won't heal, and frequently lack the energy to fully enjoy their lives.

## How to control your diabetes

Diabetes cannot be cured, but it can be controlled by keeping your blood glucose level as close to normal as possible. There are five important things you can do:

**1. See a doctor.** This is the most important step to take if you think you have diabetes. Only a doctor can accurately determine whether or not you have the disease and the best approach for treating it.

**2. Take your medication as prescribed.** There are many excellent medications available that can be taken under the direction of a doctor. These medications can help control the disease and prevent it from causing serious complications.



**3. Monitor your blood glucose level regularly.** Whether you do it yourself or you rely on healthcare professionals, make sure it is checked regularly - at least several times a day. Only with frequent and accurate measurements of your blood glucose level will you know whether there is a need to modify what you're doing in order to maintain a healthy blood glucose level.

**4. Watch what you eat. Eat regular meals.** A proper diet, skipping meals or not eating frequently enough can make your glucose level fall. A dietician can help you develop an appropriate schedule of meals and snacks. As a general rule, diabetics should:

- ▶ Eat a variety of foods
- ▶ Eat less fat
- ▶ Eat less sugar
- ▶ Eat less salt
- ▶ Avoid alcohol

**5. Be active.** Physical activity can help you feel better, control your blood sugar and weight, and even help prevent heart and circulatory problems. Many people think that exercise means joining a gym or doing vigorous activities. In fact, simply walking, or doing things you enjoy such as dancing or gardening, can provide the activity you need to help control your diabetes. Always be sure to consult with your physician before increasing your activity level or starting any kind of exercise program.