

# life line



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## Understanding Diabetes

When you have diabetes, your body does not produce enough insulin or does not use the insulin properly to convert glucose (sugar) into energy. This causes sugars to build up in your blood. Hence, sugar accumulates to a high level and the remaining glucose damages the small vessels in the body, particularly in the eyes, kidneys and nerves.

As a result, diabetes can cause serious health complications including heart disease, blindness, kidney failure and lower-extremity amputations.

### Types of Diabetes

#### Type 1 Diabetes

Type 1 diabetes is common among children and young adults, but it can occur at any age. Patients with Type 1 diabetes have high glucose levels because the pancreas does not produce enough insulin.

#### Type 2 Diabetes

This is the most common form of diabetes and it usually starts later in life, often after the age of 40. The diabetic patient produces some insulin, which is not enough or cannot be used effectively to keep the blood sugar level normal.

#### Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes occurs in pregnant women and develops in 2% to 5% of all pregnancies. Although blood glucose levels return to normal for most women after the pregnancy, about 40% of women who had gestational diabetes develop Type 2 diabetes later in life.

Many people are diabetic but are unaware of their condition. Left untreated, diabetes can lead to complications and even death.

In Singapore, about 8.2% of the adult population suffer from this condition. It can affect people of any age or race, but 90% of diabetic patients are over 40 years old.

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## Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes

The symptoms of diabetes can be very mild, such that many people may be diabetic and are not aware until complications set in. Therefore, it's important for those who are at risk or suffer from any of the following symptoms to have their blood glucose level checked:

- Frequent urination
- Unusual thirst
- Increased hunger
- Unusual weight loss
- Extreme fatigue or lack of energy
- Blurred vision

You must be especially alert if there is a history of diabetes in your family or if you are overweight.

## Treatment Options

For people with diabetes, the good news is that this condition can be controlled. With a proper treatment plan, you can reduce or even prevent the complications related to diabetes, and live a healthy life.

### The Right Diet

For a person with diabetes to remain healthy, the most important thing is to keep the blood glucose level as near to normal as possible. Besides regular exercise and taking insulin and/or tablets, a healthy diet is very important.

A healthy diet for a diabetic patient will contain:

- Mostly carbohydrates (eg. bread, pasta, rice, vegetables and fruits)
- Moderate protein intake (eg. lean meat, skinless chicken, fish and eggs)
- High fibre foods (eg. wholegrain bread, fruit and vegetables)

### Exercise

You would need a combination of diet and regular exercise to effectively manage diabetes, especially for Type 2 diabetes patients.

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Before starting your exercise programme, see your doctor for a complete physical examination. You should also discuss your exercise plans with your doctor/nurse and your dietitian. People with diabetes should take care to drink water before, during, and after exercising to prevent dehydration. You should not exercise when your sugar level is high.

### Insulin Treatment

Insulin keeps your blood sugar level in a normal range by moving glucose from your blood into your cells. Currently, there are three types of insulin treatment available:

- Injection is the most common way to deliver insulin to the body. It involves drawing insulin from a bottle into a syringe and injecting it into the body.
- An insulin pen is a combination of the syringe and insulin cartridge. The user dials a dose of insulin from a cartridge in the pen. The insulin pen has made multiple insulin injections more portable, convenient and acceptable.
- An insulin pump is a small portable device (about the size and weight of a pager) that delivers insulin continuously through a fine plastic tube into a site under the skin.

### Oral Anti-diabetes Pills Treatment

Oral anti-diabetes tablets are useful for treating Type 2 diabetes only. Before using anti-diabetes tablets, be sure to inform your doctor if you are:

- Allergic to any medicines
- Pregnant or intending to get pregnant
- Breastfeeding
- Taking any other prescription or non-prescription medicines
- Having any other medical problems

It is important that you continue to take your oral anti-diabetes tablets unless otherwise instructed by your doctor.

