

D IABETES

November is Diabetes Month. Why a month to recognize a medical diagnosis? It's because diabetes is so common, serious and under-diagnosed. There are 20.8 million children and adults in the United States, or 7% of the population, who have diabetes. While an estimated 14.6 million have been diagnosed, unfortunately, 6.2 million people (or nearly one-third) are unaware that they have the disease. Could you be one of them? Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in children and young adults, and was previously known as juvenile diabetes. Because Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age, (and also because young people with Type 1 diabetes grow up to be adults with diabetes), we don't refer to it by that name anymore. In type 1 diabetes, the body does not produce insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to convert sugar (glucose), starches and other food into energy needed for daily life. It's hard to have Type 1 diabetes and not realize that something is terribly wrong. In addition to the typical symptoms of high blood sugar like frequent urination, thirst, fatigue and blurred vision, the person with Type 1 diabetes often loses a significant amount of weight without trying and develops nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain due to the development of ketoacidosis. Once a diagnosis is made and insulin is replaced, the person with Type 1 diabetes needs to learn how to balance food, activity and insulin to control their blood sugar levels. Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes; approximately 95% of Americans with diabetes have Type 2. In type 2 diabetes, either the body does not produce enough insulin or the cells can't use the insulin due to a problem known as insulin resistance. The focus of treating Type 2 diabetes is usually aimed at treating the body's resistance to insulin with oral medication, healthy eating habits, exercise and weight control, and sometimes by replacing insulin itself. If a person can't make insulin (Type 1 diabetes) or has insulin resistance (Type 2 diabetes), too much sugar is left in the blood instead of going into cells. This it can cause two problems: Right away, your cells may be starved for energy. Over time, high blood glucose levels may hurt your eyes, kidneys, nerves or heart. Diabetes is the leading cause of new blindness, lower limb amputation and kidney failure in adults, and increases the risk of heart disease and stroke two- to three-fold. Common risk factors for insulin resistance and Type 2 diabetes are: ~a family history of diabetes; ~overweight; ~a sedentary lifestyle. Knowing you have diabetes is the first step in preventing its serious complications. Though the person who is developing Type 2 diabetes may have symptoms like thirst, frequent urination and blurred vision, it is possible to have diabetes with no symptoms at all. So, be sure to see your healthcare provider.