Diabetes: What You Need to Know

Recognising Symptoms & Reducing Your Risk



What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic condition where blood sugar (glucose) levels become too high because the body either doesn't produce insulin, doesn't produce enough, or can't use it effectively.

As of 2024, **5.6 million people** in the UK are living with diabetes.

Around **90%** of these individuals have Type 2 Diabetes.

549,000 people in the UK are currently at risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes.

Understanding the Types

Type 1 Diabetes

An autoimmune condition where the body destroys insulin-producing cells. It is usually diagnosed in children or young adults and not preventable.

Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body becomes resistant to insulin or doesn't produce enough of it. Often lifestyle-related and can be managed.

Type 1.5 Diabetes / LADA

A slow-onset autoimmune diabetes in adults that shares traits with both type 1 and type 2, often misdiagnosed and typically requires insulin treatment.

Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes occurs during pregnancy when hormones produced by the placenta cause insulin resistance, leading to high blood sugar.

Spot the Signs

If you notice any of the following symptoms, speak to your GP:

- Feeling very thirsty
- Frequent urination, especially at night
- Unexplained weight loss
- Extreme fatigue
- Slow-healing wounds
- Symptoms of low-blood sugar: shakiness, dizziness, mood changes
- Symptoms of high blood sugar: increased thirst/hunger, frequent infections

Some people may have no symptoms at all, especially in early stages.



Know Your Risk Factors

Type of Diabetes	Key Risk Factors
Type 1 Diabetes	Family history, childhood onset, white ethnicity
Type 2 Diabetes	Being overweight, inactivity, age 45+, family history, certain ethnic backgrounds (e.g. South Asian, Black African), fatty liver
Gestational Diabetes	Overweight before/during pregnancy, PCOS, age 25+, previous high birth-weight baby (>9 lbs), ethnic background (e.g. South Asian, Black African, Hispanic)

Reduce Your Risk: Lifestyle and Diet Tips

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Being overweight increases the risk of type 2 diabetes significantly. For those at risk, losing even 5–10% of your body weight can reduce the risk by around 60%.

Eat a Balanced, Nutritious Diet

Prioritise vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, lean proteins, and healthy fats to support blood sugar balance and long-term health.

Cut Back on Processed and Sugary Foods

Minimise intake of sugary drinks, refined carbs, and ultra-processed snacks to reduce glucose spikes and improve insulin response.

Stay Active

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, such as brisk walking, cycling, or swimming. Physical activity helps your body use insulin more effectively and lowers blood sugar levels.