

# When it comes to diabetes, knowledge is power

Aetna Health Connections<sup>SM</sup>  
Wellness Resources

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases among children in the United States. About 150,000 young people under 18 years old – or about one in every 400 to 500 – have diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

## Common signs and symptoms to know

The most common symptoms of diabetes parents may notice include:

- Frequent urination (including night urination or the sudden appearance of bedwetting)
- Abnormal thirst
- Extreme hunger
- Unusual weight loss or gain
- Increased fatigue
- Irritability
- Blurry vision
- Drowsiness or lethargy
- Sugar in the urine

The symptoms of diabetes are caused by having too much sugar in the bloodstream. Your doctor can test your child for this condition.



## Childhood obesity and its link to diabetes

Research has shown a strong connection between childhood obesity and diabetes. Parents must understand that obesity is a major risk factor that can cause Type 2 diabetes in children. Encouraging your child to modify his or her lifestyle – such as changing eating habits and increasing exercise levels – may help delay or even prevent the development of diabetes.

## What you need to know about diabetes in children

Knowing the facts about diabetes can help reduce your child's risk of developing this disease.

Children can be diagnosed with two types of diabetes:

- **Type 1** diabetes occurs when your child's pancreas produces little or no insulin. Because of this, children with Type 1 diabetes must inject insulin several times every day. While the causes of Type 1 diabetes are not completely understood, researchers think genetics may play a role.
- **Type 2** diabetes has recently started to appear earlier, and with more frequency, in children. With Type 2 diabetes, the body does not make enough insulin or is not able to use it effectively. Healthy eating, exercise, self-monitoring of blood sugar levels and, in some cases, oral drugs or insulin injections may help control the disease.

By managing their weight and keeping physically active, children may be able to prevent or delay the onset of Type 2 diabetes. Some risk factors for Type 2 diabetes, however, cannot be prevented. For example, having one or more family members with the disease increases a child's risk, as does being of American Indian, African American or Hispanic/Latino American descent.

## Complications of diabetes

People with diabetes are also more likely to develop problems in specific areas, such as their skin and feet. They may also have oral health problems like gum disease.

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## Take control of your child's diabetes

Routine exams for children with diabetes should include:

- **Eye exams** – The first examination should occur when the child is 10 years of age and has had diabetes for 3–5 years. After the initial examination, annual routine follow-up is generally recommended.
- **Dental exams** – Make sure your child receives regular dental check-ups at least twice a year, and make sure your dentist is aware of your child's diabetes.
- **Foot assessments** – Have your child's feet examined by the doctor during routine office visits, and have your child look at his or her feet daily. Report any sores to your child's doctor immediately.

## Develop a diabetes management plan

The goal is to maintain control over your child's diabetes to prevent or slow the progress of complications such as nerve damage, eye damage, kidney disease and heart disease.

Basic care for children with diabetes includes:

- **Eat a healthy diet, including regularly scheduled meals and frequent snacks.** Make healthy foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables and whole grains) available and avoid buying foods high in fat, sodium and added sugar. The food pyramid is an easy way to remember the healthiest way to eat. To view the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recently updated version, visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).
- **Exercise on a regular basis.** Studies show that just 30 minutes of moderate physical activity a day, along with a 5 to 10 percent decrease in body weight, can reduce the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes by 58 percent.<sup>1</sup>
- **Take insulin/medications regularly, and as prescribed.** Children with Type 1 diabetes need daily insulin injections, up to four times a day. Children with Type 2 diabetes may be able to control their condition by eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly. If not, they may need oral medication or insulin.
- **Check blood sugar levels several times a day.** Children with diabetes usually need to test their levels with a blood glucose meter several times a day.

<sup>1</sup>American Diabetes Association. How to Prevent or Delay Diabetes. Available at <http://diabetes.org/diabetes-prevention/how-to-prevent-diabetes.jsp>. Accessed January 11, 2006.

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## Additional resources

**Aetna's Children's Health website**  
<http://womenshealth.aetna.com>  
Click on *Children's Health*.

## Aetna's Children's Diabetes Videos – For Kids, Teens and Parents

[www.aetna.com](http://www.aetna.com). From the home page, select *Members, Health and Wellness, Living Well, Children's Health, Diabetes* and then *Diabetes Videos*.

**Children's Health on Aetna IntelliHealth®**  
[www.intelihealth.com](http://www.intelihealth.com)

**American Diabetes Association\***  
[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)  
1-800-342-2383

**Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation\***  
[www.jdrf.org](http://www.jdrf.org)  
1-800-533-2873

**National Diabetes Education Program\***  
[www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov)  
1-800-438-5383

**National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse\***  
[www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)  
1-800-860-8747

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