Understanding Prediabetes and Type 2 Diabetes

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Prediabetes

Prediabetes is a wake-up call that you’re on the path to diabetes, but it’s not too late to turn things around. If you have it (like 79 million other Americans), your blood sugar (glucose) level is higher than it should be, but not in the diabetes range. People used to call it "borderline" diabetes.

Normally, your body makes a hormone called insulin to help control your blood sugar. When you have prediabetes, that system doesn't work as well as it should. You might not be able to make enough insulin after eating, or your body might not respond to insulin properly.

Prediabetes makes you more likely to get heart disease or have a stroke, but you can take action to lower those risks.

Diagnosis: Your doctor will give you one of three simple blood tests:

Fasting plasma glucose test: (You won't eat for 8 hours before taking this blood test.) The results are:

- Normal if your blood sugar is less than 100
- Prediabetes if your blood sugar is 100-125
- Diabetes if your blood sugar is 126 or higher

Oral glucose tolerance test: First, you'll take the fasting glucose test, then you'll drink a sugary solution, and two hours after that, you'll take another blood test. The results are:

- Normal if your blood sugar is less than 140 after the second test
- Prediabetes if your blood sugar is 140-199 after the second test
- Diabetes if your blood sugar is 200 or higher after the second test

Hemoglobin A1C (or average blood sugar) test: This blood test shows your average blood sugar level for the past 3 to 4 months. Doctors can use it to diagnose prediabetes or diabetes or, if you already know you have diabetes, it helps show whether it's under control. The results are:

- Normal: 5.6% or less
- Prediabetes: 5.7 to 6.4%
- Diabetes: 6.5% or above
Type 2 Diabetes

When you have this disease, your body does a poor job turning the carbohydrates in food into energy. This causes sugar to build up in your blood. Over time it raises your risk for heart disease, blindness, nerve and organ damage, and other serious conditions. It strikes people of all ages, and early symptoms are mild. About 1 out of 3 people with type 2 diabetes don't know they have it.

People with type 2 diabetes often have no symptoms. When they do appear, one of the first may be being thirsty a lot. Others include dry mouth, bigger appetite, peeing a lot -- sometimes as often as every hour -- and unusual weight loss or gain. As your blood sugar levels get higher, you may have other problems like headaches, blurred vision, and fatigue.

In many cases, type 2 diabetes isn't discovered until it takes a serious toll on your health. Some red flags include:

- Cuts or sores that are slow to heal
- Frequent yeast infections or urinary tract infections
- Itchy skin, especially in the groin area

Some health habits and medical conditions related to your lifestyle can raise your odds of having type 2 diabetes, including:

- Being overweight, especially at the waist
- A couch potato lifestyle
- Smoking
- Eating a lot of red meat, processed meat, high-fat dairy products, and sweets
- Unhealthy cholesterol and triglyceride levels

Diet: You can control blood sugar levels by changing your diet and losing extra weight. That will also cut your risk of complications. Carefully track the carbs in your diet. Keep amounts the same at every meal, watch how much fat and protein you eat, and cut calories. Ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian to help you make healthy choices and an eating plan.

Exercise: Regular exercise, like strength training or walking, improves your body’s use of insulin and can lower blood sugar levels. Being active also helps get rid of body fat, lower blood pressure, and protect you from heart disease. Try to get 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week.

Relaxation: Stress can boost your blood pressure and blood sugar. Some people don't do anything for it. Others turn to food to cope with it. Instead, practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or visualization. Talking to a friend, family member, counselor, or a religious leader could help. If you can’t beat it, reach out to your doctor.

Heart and Artery Problems: If you don't treat diabetes with a healthy diet and exercise, you're more likely to get plaque in your arteries than people who don't have it. This sticky substance slows blood flow and increases your risk of clots.
It leads to hardening of the arteries (called atherosclerosis), which makes you more likely to have a heart attack or stroke. About 2 of 3 people with diabetes die of heart disease.

**Kidney Complications:** The longer you have diabetes, the greater the chance you’ll get chronic kidney disease. Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure. It's to blame for about half of new cases. Controlling your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol can lower your risk for this complication. Yearly tests and medications can slow the disease and keep your kidneys healthy.

**Eye Problems:** High blood sugar can damage the tiny blood vessels that bring oxygen and nutrients to the retina, a critical part of your eye. This is known as diabetic retinopathy, and it can lead to vision loss. It’s the leading cause of new cases of blindness in people between the ages of 20 and 74. Pools of blood, or hemorrhages, on the retina of an eye are visible in this image.

Over time, uncontrolled diabetes and high blood sugar can cause nerve damage. Symptoms include tingling, numbness, pain, and a pins and needles sensation -- often in your fingers, hands, toes, or feet. The damage can’t be reversed, but there are treatments. Controlling your diabetes can help prevent further harm.

**Foot Injuries:** Diabetic nerve damage can make it hard to feel your feet. You might not notice wounds. At the same time, hardening of the arteries reduces blood flow to the area. Even a small injury can cause foot sores and gangrene. In severe cases, infections can result in an amputation.

**Teeth and Gums:** High blood sugar levels can feed the bacteria that make plaque. Plaque buildup leads to cavities, tooth decay, and gum disease. Severe gum disease can cause tooth loss. It weakens gums and the tissues and bones that hold teeth in place. That makes it easier to get an infection, too.

3 Key Lifestyle Changes to Make Now

Lifestyle changes can help many people with prediabetes delay or prevent it from becoming diabetes. In a large research study called the Diabetes Prevention Program, these changes cut the odds of getting diabetes:

1. **Weight control.** If you're overweight, your prediabetes is more likely to turn into diabetes. Losing even as little as 5% to 10% of your body weight makes a difference.

2. **Exercise.** Get moderate exercise for 30 minutes a day, such as cycling, swimming, or brisk walking. It helps prevent and manage diabetes, studies show. Aerobic exercise, the kind that gets your heart rate up, is ideal. If you're not active now, check with your doctor first.

3. **Nutrition.** Go for meals that mix low-fat protein, vegetables, and whole grains. Limit calories, serving sizes, sugar, and starchy carbs. Favor fiber-rich foods, which help you feel full and not eat too much.

*Source: WebMD Medical*
Contact [Sullivan Benefits](https://www.sullivanbenefits.com) for assistance on how to educate your employees and their family members about how to prevent, treat and manage a diabetes diagnosis. Prevention is key!

Congratulations, just taking the time to read this article is a positive step toward introducing wellness and the benefits available from a healthier lifestyle. Thank you for your time and THINK WELLNESS!