

For More Information Contact the
National Diabetes Education Program
at **1-800-438-5383**
or **www.ndep.nih.gov**



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Make Health a Family Reunion Affair

sanofi aventis

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Diabetes


Make Health a Family Reunion Affair

Family reunions are fun and give relatives plenty of time to talk about old times, honor ancestors, sample favorite family recipes, and enjoy being together. And while the family is together, it's also a great time to talk about family health.

This brochure will help you talk to your family about diabetes and its complications. It is important to talk to your family about the risk factors, the need to get tested, and the treatments that are available.

These approaches are only suggestions. Feel free to present the information in a way that's comfortable for you and interesting for your family. Sharing this information can go a long way toward helping ensure that family members enjoy many more reunions to come.



Use family time together to show you care about family health

What is diabetes?

Diabetes means that the amount of glucose (sugar) in your blood is too high. That's why people sometimes call diabetes "sugar" or "sweet blood." Your blood always has some glucose in it because your body needs glucose for energy. But too much of it in the blood isn't good for your health.

Diabetes can lead to serious health problems and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to control the disease and lower the risk of damaging their kidneys, eyes, nerves, and gums and teeth.

There are two common types of diabetes:

Type 1 diabetes, formerly called juvenile diabetes, is usually first diagnosed in children, teenagers, or young adults. People with type 1 diabetes make no insulin and must take insulin every day. (Insulin helps sugar from food get into your cells.)

Type 2 diabetes, formerly called adult-onset diabetes, is the most common type of diabetes. With type 2 diabetes, the body does not make or use insulin well. People with type 2 diabetes often need to follow a healthy diet plan, get regular exercise, and take pills and/or insulin. Being overweight and inactive increases the chances of developing type 2 diabetes.

Am I at risk for diabetes?

You have a higher chance of getting diabetes if you:

- ▶ Are age 45 or older
- ▶ Are overweight
- ▶ Are African American, Hispanic, Asian American or Pacific Islander, or American Indian
- ▶ Have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes
- ▶ Have high blood pressure (above 140/90)
- ▶ Have low HDL (good cholesterol) and high levels of blood fats
- ▶ Had diabetes when pregnant, or gave birth to a large baby (over 9 pounds)
- ▶ Are physically active less than three times a week

How do I know if I have diabetes?

You may have one or more of the warning signs below, or you may have no signs at all. Talk to your doctor about getting a blood test to check your glucose levels to know if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes (a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes).

The signs of diabetes are:

- ▶ Being very thirsty
- ▶ Urinating often
- ▶ Feeling very hungry or tired
- ▶ Losing weight without trying
- ▶ Having sores that heal slowly
- ▶ Having dry, itchy skin

- ▶ Losing the feeling in your feet or having tingling in your feet
- ▶ Having blurry eyesight

What can I do to control or reduce my risk of developing diabetes?

Managing diabetes requires effort every day to eat healthy foods, be physically active, take diabetes medicine as prescribed, and test blood glucose levels. You can take steps to reduce your risk of developing other health problems diabetes can cause over the years by keeping your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol under control. If you have diabetes, work with your health care provider to create a plan for managing your health.

You can do a lot to lower your chances of getting diabetes. Some tips are:

- ▶ Be physically active on a regular basis
- ▶ Eat less fat and fewer calories
- ▶ Lose weight if you need to



Lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels also helps you stay healthy. Talk to your health care provider to make a plan to lessen your risk and improve your health.

Tips for approaching family members

Sometimes it can be awkward talking to family members one-on-one about personal health issues. Keep these tips in mind when approaching family members at risk:

- ▶ Familiarize yourself with the facts in this brochure. Offer to help family members find more information.
- ▶ Ask permission to have the conversation, and choose the right time and environment. A quiet, private place that is free from distractions is best.
- ▶ If a family member is not comfortable talking about their health, don't force a discussion. Express your feelings of concern. Let them know that you'll be ready to talk whenever they are.
- ▶ Acknowledge that it's not always easy to face our personal health problems. Be supportive and listen. Emphasize that the final decision to talk to the doctor is theirs.
- ▶ Offer to go with them to the doctor.



Encourage family members to look out for one another

Designate family health buddies

Designate a "family health buddy" for each family member. Ask family members to pair up and exchange contact information. Then, ask everyone to commit to follow up with their family health buddy at some point over the next three months to check on his or her health.

Encourage family members to continue to follow up with each other, especially those who have diabetes risk factors or other illnesses.

Create a follow-up list of family members at risk

If your family is one that talks openly about their personal health conditions, you may already know which members of your family have one or more diabetes risk factors. Make a list of these family members. Collect their contact information and follow up with a call, email, letter, or visit sometime over the next three months to again encourage them to talk to their doctor or health care provider about whether they are at risk of developing diabetes. A friendly reminder gives you and other family members a chance to express your concern, and may be just what the family member at risk needs to take the next step.