

# Lifestyle Changes to Prevent Diabetes

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## What is Diabetes?<sup>1</sup>

Diabetes is a chronic disease that causes high levels of glucose (or sugar) in your blood.

Over time, high blood sugar can lead to damage in your small and large blood vessels, which can then lead to heart disease. Prediabetes is when you have a higher than normal blood sugar level but it is not yet considered high enough to be diabetes.

The pancreas, a part of our body near our stomach, makes insulin. Our body uses insulin to keep sugar levels normal. There are two types of diabetes. In type 1 diabetes, the pancreas loses the ability to make insulin. Type 1 diabetes is not related to prediabetes.

Prediabetes happens before type 2 diabetes. In prediabetes, the body does not use insulin well, so the body makes extra insulin. Over time, the pancreas is not able to make as much insulin, and type 2 diabetes develops. If you have prediabetes, there are steps you can take to help prevent the transition to diabetes.

People who lose and keep off a moderate amount of weight, with changes in diet and increased physical activity, lower their risk for diabetes by as much as 50%.

Diabetes prevention is most successful when your health care team supports and guides your efforts. As you make changes to prevent diabetes, make an appointment with your primary care provider or another clinician on your health care team, who may recommend a Diabetes Prevention Program or other resources to support your success.

## Your risk for prediabetes and type 2 diabetes is higher if you:<sup>1</sup>

- Are overweight, obese, or have excess fat around your stomach
- Spend significant time sitting or lying down during the day instead of being active
- Have a parent or sibling with type 2 diabetes
- Are African American, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian American
- Are age 45 or older
- Had diabetes during pregnancy (gestational diabetes)

Our 60-Second Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test

**Are you taking this test for yourself, or for a loved one?**

FOR MYSELF

FOR SOMEONE ELSE

**Take the 60-second Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test by visiting**  
**[www.diabetes.org/risk-test](http://www.diabetes.org/risk-test)**

## Your Plan to Prevent Diabetes:<sup>1-4</sup>

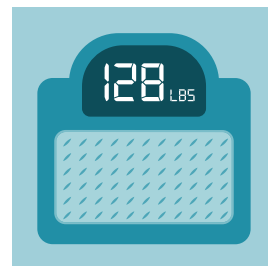
Take these six steps to prevent diabetes and improve your health.

### 1. Set a weight loss goal

If you are overweight or obese, try to lose and keep off 5-10% of your current weight. For example, if you are 200 pounds, try to lose 10-20 pounds. Maintaining a healthy weight can lower blood pressure and heart disease risk along with lowering the risk of diabetes. To find your weight loss goal range, fill in the following:

Your weight \_\_\_ x 0.05 = \_\_\_ Your 5% weight loss goal

Your weight \_\_\_ x 0.10 = \_\_\_ Your 10% weight loss goal



### 2. Create and follow a healthy eating plan

To lose and keep off weight, your eating plan needs to be maintained long-term. Simple changes in how you shop, what you cook, how you cook, and how you snack can make a big difference. **Use the resource on page 6, [On Your Way to Preventing Type 2 Diabetes](#), and the important tips below to help you establish a healthy eating plan:**



#### Choose Healthy Options

- ✓ Drink water to quench your thirst. Zero calorie drinks may be used on occasion.
- ✓ Bake, broil, roast, air-fry, or stir-fry using olive oil.
- ✓ Eat smaller portions using smaller plates (9 inches) and glasses.
- ✓ Have what you need at home to prepare and eat meals with protein and fiber for fullness.
- ✓ Eat second helpings of non-starchy vegetables and lean protein (such as green, leafy vegetables).
- ✓ Use the **DASH** weight loss diet and pick foods with lower salt if you have high blood pressure.
- ✓ Shop with a grocery list and buy only items on the list.
- ✓ Snack on fruits, vegetables, or a small handful of unsalted nuts.
- ✓ Before dining out, look at the menu online and:
  - choose baked, steamed, grilled, or broiled options.
  - share your entree with a friend/family.
  - box/wrap half your meal before eating.
  - order sauces, dressings, or spreads on the side.
- ✓ When consuming pasta, consider using whole wheat, bean, or cauliflower based pastas.
- ✓ If you are having difficulty finding healthy, affordable foods, [The Thrifty Food Plan](#) and [FindHelp.org](#) are good resources for exploring cost effective options.

#### Avoid/Limit Unhealthy Options

- ✗ Pass on sugary drinks like soda or pop, sweet teas, Kool-Aid, and fruit juices.
- ✗ Avoid frying and fried foods.
- ✗ Avoid filling plates or bowls completely. This will be an inaccurate serving size, and you will eat more than you should.
- ✗ Have a plan to eat meals on-time. Unplanned and skipped meals lead to unplanned snacks and picking up food on the go.
- ✗ Pass on second helpings of starchy and fatty foods.
- ✗ Avoid high salt foods like canned foods, frozen meals, chips, and many restaurant meals.
- ✗ Don't shop when hungry or tired.
- ✗ Avoid chips, cake, cookies, or candy.
- ✗ When dining out, pass on all-you-can-eat and buffet restaurants, fast food restaurants, and drive-through restaurants. These all prevent weight loss and often lead to regaining weight.

### 3. Be an Active Person for Life

Being physically active improves your heart health and helps you maintain weight loss. When you are active, you burn calories and keep more of your muscle, or lean weight. Even if you don't lose weight, being more active helps prevent type 2 diabetes and reduces your risk for heart attack and stroke. Exercise also has many other health benefits including improved mood, muscle strength, and endurance.



#### **Start slowly and work up to 150 minutes a week or more of moderate-intensity activity.**

- Moderate-intensity activities include brisk walking, aerobic dancing, bicycle riding, swimming, water aerobics, skating, swimming, sports that involve catching, throwing, or volleying, and general gardening.
- If you have not been active, starting with a 5-10 minute walk (or doing another activity that you like) most days of the week. Each week, add more time until you reach at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity five days a week. Weight is kept off more easily if you can do even more.
- During moderate intensity activities, you should have enough breath to talk, but not sing during your activity.

#### **Be active throughout your day**

- **Sit less during the day.** Get up every hour and move while watching TV or working. Walk or dance around the room, march in place, or simply stand up and stretch.
- **Count your steps.** Use a pedometer or other wearable device to keep track of your steps. Try to work up to 7,000-10,000 steps per day. Each increment of 2,000 steps per day up to 10,000 steps is associated with a 10% lower cardiovascular event rate.<sup>5</sup>
- Wear walking shoes and clothing that provide comfort and support during your activity.
- **Make it fun.** Turn up the music. Go dancing with friends and family members. Enjoy sports with the kids. Figure out what makes it fun for you and keep at it.
- **Choose social activities.** Go biking, bowling, dancing, or skating. Visit parks and play active games. Ask family and friends to join you.
- Use exercise videos to increase activity during the day and in inclement weather.

## 4. Address Your Stress

Stress can worsen blood sugar levels and increase your risk for heart and other health problems. Regularly do things to prevent or reduce feelings of stress.



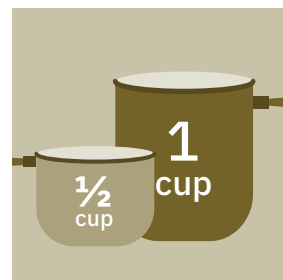
- **Disconnect from technology for a period of time.** Leave your devices out of reach. You control them; don't allow them to control you.
- **Do something active.** Physical activity reduces stress and improves mood.
- **Connect with friends and family regularly.** Being with and talking to supportive people you trust and love, even by phone, reduces stress and improves health.
- **Sleep more.** Sleep helps control blood sugar. Sleep 7 to 8 hours a day. Turn off the TV and sleep in a quiet, dark room.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Stay in the present moment, slow down, and breathe.
- **Get support to prevent or manage problems.** If you struggle with stress from caregiving, money issues, addiction, or other issues, find help to understand and manage your situation - there are many available resources. Contacting a mental health provider or social worker is often a good first step.
- **Connect to programs and people in your community and online.** Primary care providers, local hospitals and health departments, libraries, senior centers, or faith-based organizations may offer to connect you to programs or classes about diabetes prevention or to address stressors.

## 5. Track for Success

People who keep track of their weight, what they eat, and their activity reach their goals and stick with their good habits twice as often as those who do not track. Choose the tracking tools that work best for you – it can be as simple as a notebook and pen.

- **Track your weight.** Weigh yourself regularly, using the same scale at the same time of day. Weighing once or twice weekly can work well. People who are overweight or obese often lose 1-3 pounds a week when making healthy diet changes.
- **Follow food portions.** Use measuring cups and spoons, a kitchen scale, food labels, and a calculator.
- **Keep a food record.** Use printed food logs, a notebook, smart phone or computer apps, or photos of your food - most are free.
- **Record activity.** Write it down, use a fitness tracker, pedometer, timer, smart phone, watch, or computer apps.
- **Assess stress.** Record your feelings, pain, and time spent sleeping.

Along the way, identify and track supports and barriers. Make notes of what seems to stand in your way. How can you address these things to make progress toward a healthier life? Who might be able to help? When you review, consider ways to increase supports for and lower barriers to healthy eating, increased activity, and stress management.



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## 6. Celebrate Your Success!

Changing your lifestyle takes thought, work, and commitment. Reward and celebrate yourself in healthy ways for reaching both small and large goals. Rewards like getting new exercise clothes, getting a massage, and going to a concert help you feel the value of your changes and of yourself. It is important to look beyond the scale and focus on the improvements in your overall health and wellbeing.



## Additional Resources

- **60-Second Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test**

Assesses risk level for developing diabetes.

[diabetes.org/risk-test](https://diabetes.org/risk-test)

- **Body Mass Index Calculator**

An easy-to-use tool to calculate body mass index.

[nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose\\_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm)

- **Your Game Plan to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes**

A step-by-step plan to help you prevent diabetes.

[niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes/overview/preventing-type-2-diabetes/game-plan](https://niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes/overview/preventing-type-2-diabetes/game-plan)

- **The Diabetes Prevention Toolkit**

Offers dozens of resources, ideas, and tools for families, schools, healthcare providers, employers, and public health policymakers to help improve the diabetes epidemic.

[hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/disease-prevention/diabetes-prevention/diabetes-prevention-toolkit/](https://hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/disease-prevention/diabetes-prevention/diabetes-prevention-toolkit/)

- **On Your Way to Preventing Type 2 Diabetes**

A resource to help people with prediabetes make small, healthy lifestyle changes.

[cdc.gov/diabetes/prevent-type-2/guide-prevent-type2-diabetes.html](https://cdc.gov/diabetes/prevent-type-2/guide-prevent-type2-diabetes.html)

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