

# Diabetes risk factors

Below you will find additional information about the common risk factors for diabetes.

## Obesity

Being obese or overweight is generally due to eating too much and not getting sufficient physical exercise.

- A healthy diet and moderate exercise have been shown to be effective in preventing diabetes, even in persons with pre-diabetes or with other diabetes risk factors.
- The loss of 7 to 10 percent of a person's body weight can reduce his or her risk for developing diabetes.
- Stay active—30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week is highly recommended.

## Family history of diabetes

- Family refers to father, mother, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and first cousins with diabetes.
- A family history of diabetes is not preventable, but it does indicate which people might have a tendency toward diabetes. People with a family history of diabetes should be encouraged to follow healthy lifestyles and medical recommendations to prevent diabetes.

## High blood pressure

- A blood pressure measurement exceeding 140/90 mm/Hg is often considered hypertension. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm/Hg). An increase in blood pressure can increase the risk of heart complications and stroke. If the person has diabetes, this rise in blood pressure can worsen diabetes complications in the eyes and kidneys.
- It is recommended that persons with diabetes maintain blood pressure less than 130/80 mm/Hg.
- A blood pressure reading in the normal range will improve health outcomes, which is especially important for preventing complications in people with diabetes or pre-diabetes.

## **High cholesterol and high triglycerides**

- Cholesterol and triglycerides are fats normally found in the blood. When high levels of these fats are found, there is a greater risk of heart attack or problems with blood vessels. Cholesterol is measured in milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dL). There are two types of cholesterol. LDL cholesterol is known as “bad cholesterol” because when it increases, it indicates a greater risk for heart and blood vessel problems. Think of the L as “lousy.”
- HDL cholesterol is known as “good cholesterol” because when it increases, it decreases the risk of these problems. Think of the H as “happy.”
- The LDL reading should be less than 100 mg/dL. The HDL reading should be greater than 40mg/dL for men and should be greater than 50mg/dL for women.
- Triglycerides, another type of fat, should not be greater than 150mg/dL.
- A diet low in animal fat, along with moderate exercise, can help to reduce cholesterol.

## **Gestational diabetes**

- Some women develop a type of diabetes that only lasts during their pregnancy. Sometimes, this type of diabetes is not detected. Gestational diabetes can be suspected if a woman has had a baby weighing more than nine pounds (four kilograms).
- Women who have had gestational diabetes during pregnancy have a greater risk for developing type 2 diabetes at any point later in life. Because of this, it is important to know if a woman had gestational diabetes during her pregnancy.

For more information about diabetes, visit the National Diabetes Education Program Website at [www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov).