



# Diabetes

Everybody needs insulin for their body to function properly. Diabetes occurs when the pancreas does not produce insulin, or when it is not properly recognised by other cells in the body. This results in too much glucose (sugar) circulating in the blood.

## There are two types of diabetes:

**Type 1 diabetes** is caused when the pancreas stops producing insulin. It affects 10-15% of people with diabetes. In Type 1 diabetes, the insulin producing cells are destroyed by the body's own immune system. As a result, glucose cannot be used by active muscles, and rapidly builds up in the blood flow. This type of diabetes may occur due to family predisposition, virus or other toxin. Type 1 diabetes is often referred to as *early onset diabetes* because its effects are usually noticed at a young age. Treatment for Type 1 diabetes includes the replacement of insulin via injections (usually several times a day), balanced with healthy eating and is guided by regular monitoring of blood glucose levels.

The majority of people with diabetes have **Type 2 diabetes**. In the beginning stages of Type 2 diabetes, insulin is still produced by the pancreas, but is less effective than normal. This type of diabetes usually occurs in people over 30 years of age but it may occur in overweight teenagers and children with a family history of diabetes. Diabetes often runs in the family and can be triggered by aspects of lifestyle such as excess weight and inactivity. People with Type 2 diabetes are more likely to carry excess weight around the waist and have high blood pressure. They are also more likely to have raised cholesterol and heart disease. The aim of treatment is to control blood glucose levels and to prevent long-term problems associated with diabetes, such as heart disease.

Healthy eating and physical activity are the first steps in managing blood glucose levels and blood pressure. If blood glucose levels are not well enough controlled with diet and exercise, anti-diabetic tablets may be necessary. Many people with Type 2 diabetes will also require insulin injections at some stage to manage their illness.