

# Know Your Risk Factors

## Diabetes



American Heart Association   
*Learn and Live.*

### Insulin and Diabetes

Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, for our bodies to use for energy. This happens because the hormone insulin converts sugar and other food into energy and helps glucose get into our bodies' cells. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin as well as it should, or both. This causes sugars to build up too high in your blood.

### Types of Diabetes

This disease has two main forms: type 1 and type 2.

Type 1, or juvenile diabetes, usually starts early in life. It results from the body's failure to produce insulin. People with it must take insulin each day to regulate levels of blood glucose (sugar).

Type 2 is the most common. About 90 to 95 percent of Americans diagnosed with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. It most often develops in middle-aged and older adults, and is often linked with obesity and physical inactivity. Type 2 diabetes develops when the body doesn't make enough insulin and doesn't efficiently use the insulin it makes (insulin resistance).

### Who Gets Diabetes

Diabetes is increasing. This is because more people are obese, don't get enough physical activity and are getting older. However, many younger people are developing diabetes at an alarming rate. This is probably because obesity and lack of physical activity are increasing problems for this group, too.

People in several ethnic groups seem to be more likely to develop type 2 diabetes:

- Hispanics
- African Americans
- Native Americans
- Asians (especially South Asians)

### Controlling Other Risks for Heart Disease and Stroke

Diabetes is a major risk factor for stroke and heart disease. That means it can be as serious as smoking, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity or obesity. If you have diabetes, it's very important to have regular check-ups and work closely with your healthcare provider to manage your diabetes and reduce any other risk factors. Here are some steps you can take:

- Control your weight and blood cholesterol with a low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol diet.



## Know Your Risk Factors

# Diabetes

*(continued)*

- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most or all days of the week. Join "Choose To Move," the American Heart Association's free 12-week physical activity program for women who Go Red. The program offers practical ways to increase physical activity, make heart-healthy and tasty food choices, and reduce heart disease and stroke risks. For more information, visit [www.chooseformove.org](http://www.chooseformove.org).
- If you drink alcohol and are a woman, don't have more than one drink per day.
- Lower your blood pressure, if it's too high.
- Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Specific medicines may help you control your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose. Your doctor will advise you if one is right for you. If you take medicine, take it exactly as directed. If you have questions about the dosage or side effects, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

### For More Information

Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals to learn more about diabetes.

If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.

Learn your risk for heart attack and stroke by taking the Go Red Heart CheckUp at [www.goredforwomen.org](http://www.goredforwomen.org). To learn more facts about heart disease and how to reduce your risk, visit [www.goredforwomen.org/resources](http://www.goredforwomen.org/resources) and select "Patient Information Sheets" under the **Health Tools** section.

