

# Diabetes Myths

Diabetes is a complex disease. You may have heard conflicting theories on what causes it, how it is diagnosed, and how it is managed. If you are affected by diabetes, you will want the truth about the disease. Here are some common myths that you may have heard:

**There is no diabetes in my family, so I don't have to worry.** Diabetes does run in families, but many people diagnosed with the disease have no close family members who have it. Lifestyle, heredity, and possibly other factors, such as certain viruses, may increase risk for the disease.

**It's called sugar diabetes, so it must come from the sugar I eat.** When you eat food, the body turns it into a form of energy called glucose, also known as "blood sugar." Glucose is not the refined sugar that you buy in stores. Insulin helps move the blood sugar into the body's cells for energy. When the body's own insulin does not work well or when not enough is made, the blood sugar level rises. Then the person has diabetes.

**I'll know that I have diabetes by my symptoms.** A person with type 1 diabetes, usually seen in children and young adults, will have obvious symptoms, because they have little or no insulin, the hormone that controls the blood sugar level. However, people with type 2 diabetes, which usually occurs later in life, or women who have gestational diabetes, the diabetes that only appears during pregnancy, may have few or no symptoms. Their symptoms are milder since they still produce some insulin. Unfortunately, they don't make enough insulin, or it is not being used properly. Only a blood test can tell for sure if someone has diabetes.

**My doctor says I have "borderline" diabetes. Since I have just a "touch of sugar," I don't have to worry.** There is no such thing as borderline diabetes. To many people, "borderline" means they don't really have the disease, so they don't have to make any changes to control it. This is wrong. If you have diabetes, you have diabetes. Diabetes must be treated and taken seriously.

**By drinking water, I can wash away the extra sugar in my blood and cure my diabetes.**

Although you can wash away sugar spilled on a table, you cannot wash away a high blood sugar level by drinking water. However, you can control diabetes by eating healthy food, being physically active, controlling your weight, seeing your medical team regularly, taking prescribed medications, and monitoring your blood sugar often.

**Insulin is a cure for diabetes.** Insulin is not a cure for diabetes. At this point, there is no cure; there are only medicine and behaviors that can control diabetes. Insulin helps to control diabetes by keeping the blood sugar from rising.

**My friend takes insulin pills to control her diabetes.** Insulin is a protein; it cannot be taken by mouth because the stomach would not digest it. Insulin must be given by injection or insulin pump through the skin. Diabetes pills help by making the body produce more insulin, use its own insulin better, produce less blood sugar from the liver, or limit carbohydrate absorption after a meal.

**If I don't take diabetes medicine, my diabetes must not be serious.** Not everyone who has diabetes takes diabetes medicine. If the body produces some insulin, weight loss, healthy eating habits, and regular physical activity can help insulin work more effectively. However, diabetes does change over time, and diabetes medicine may be needed later.

**If I get diabetes, I will never be able to eat any sugar.** To control one's blood sugar, all sources of carbohydrates must be controlled. Carbohydrates include starchy foods like pasta and bread as well as sugary foods like candy. Even juice, milk, and fruit all contain carbohydrates, so they must be eaten in moderate amounts. With careful planning, small amounts of sugar can replace other carbohydrates usually eaten at a meal. Too much sugar is bad for everyone. It provides only empty calories.

**I have diabetes, and I've seen its effect on family members. I know there is nothing I can do about it.** Remember that diabetes is serious, common, costly, and CONTROLLABLE. There are many things people with diabetes can do to live a full life, while preventing or delaying complications. You can control your diabetes by eating healthy foods, staying active, losing weight if needed, taking medicine as prescribed, testing your blood sugar, and seeing your health care team.