

# Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

November 2007 Newsletter



## American Diabetes Month

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With the high prevalence of type 2 diabetes in the U.S. and in Georgia, nearly all of us are affected in some way by this chronic disease. In fact, about 20.9% (10.3 million) of Americans over age 60 have diabetes. Whether you currently have diabetes or know of someone else who does, we can all benefit from learning more about it and how it can impact our lives. Fortunately, diabetes can be prevented and managed through healthy lifestyle habits and by working with a health care team.

Diabetes is diagnosed with a blood test, and occurs when blood glucose (sugar) levels are too high. The pancreas releases a hormone called insulin to help our bodies use energy by moving glucose from the blood into the cells. There are two forms of diabetes, type 1 and type 2. With the most common form of diabetes, type 2, the pancreas may still produce insulin, but not enough to keep blood sugar levels in the normal range, or the cells don't respond as they should to the insulin. Sugar then stays in the

blood, and the cells don't receive the fuel they need. Your doctor will monitor your blood glucose at regular check-ups to screen for diabetes. They can also check for prediabetes, where blood glucose is elevated, but is not high enough to diagnose diabetes. Having prediabetes increases the risk for developing diabetes.



There are many factors that can increase the risk for type 2 diabetes. For example, being over age 45, having a close relative with diabetes, being of an ethnic minority group, being overweight or obese, and low physical activity can all increase our risk. Research has shown, however, that a healthy lifestyle that includes regular moderate physical activity and a healthy eating plan that promote a healthy body weight can significantly reduce the chances of getting diabetes in those at high risk.

How do you know if you have diabetes? The signs of diabetes typically develop gradually over time

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and may include blurry vision, extreme thirst and hunger, frequent urination, and having sores that are slow to heal. Some people do not have symptoms, and many do not know that they have diabetes. That is why it is important to have your blood glucose tested by your doctor.

There are many complications associated with having high blood glucose. Examples include kidney disease; nerve damage in the extremities that can cause pain, tingling, and numbness; eye disorders; and foot complications, such as loss of feeling and poor blood circulation. One of the most common and serious complications of diabetes is cardiovascular (heart) disease. People with diabetes often have a clustering of risk factors that can increase the risk for cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol. Diabetes also can contribute to atherosclerosis, or the build-up of fatty plaques in blood vessel walls. These factors increase the risk of having a heart attack or stroke, which is why a large part of diabetes management is controlling risk factors for cardiovascular disease.



If you already have diabetes, there are several things you can do daily to help manage your condition and prevent a heart attack, stroke, and other complications. Regular physical activity can help our bodies to use insulin better and can help us to achieve a healthy body weight. Following a healthy eating plan is also important. Limiting foods with a lot of added fat (especially saturated and trans fat), salt (sodium), and sugar, and choosing plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk products, and lean protein sources is a good guideline to follow to protect the heart and fight diabetes.

Working with your health care team is also a very important part of diabetes management. Many people take medications and/or insulin injections to help control their diabetes and risk factors for heart disease. Be sure to take these as recommended by your doctor if they have been prescribed to you, because they can help to keep blood glucose levels under control if taken properly. Checking blood glucose as recommended by your doctor will also help you with diabetes management.

**For more information, see:** The National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, NIDDK, at <http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov> and The American Diabetes Association at [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).