

**FACT SHEET:**

## Understanding type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes. Eight or 9 out of 10 people with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes can be managed with healthy eating and regular physical activity. Over time, glucose-lowering medications may also be needed to help keep blood glucose levels in the target range. These may be in the form of tablets or injectable medications.

If you have type 2 diabetes, looking after your diabetes is important for good health. It can reduce your risk of developing diabetes-related complications, such as damage to the eyes, kidneys, nerves, and blood vessels.

### What is type 2 diabetes?

When a person eats and drinks carbohydrates (carbs) such as bread, pasta, rice, cereals, fruits, starchy vegetables, milk, and yoghurt, it is broken down into a type of sugar called glucose. Insulin is a hormone that allows glucose to move from the bloodstream into the body's cells. The cells use glucose for energy.

When you have type 2 diabetes, your pancreas either cannot make any or enough insulin, and/or the insulin it makes does not work very well (also known as insulin resistance). This results in too much glucose in the bloodstream.

### Who is at risk of type 2 diabetes?

Anyone can develop type 2 diabetes: adults, young adults and even children.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include:

- having a family history of type 2 diabetes
- having pre-diabetes
- being above the healthy weight range
- having an inactive lifestyle
- increasing age
- having an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
- being from a Melanesian, Polynesian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern or Indian background

- having had gestational diabetes
- having polycystic ovary syndrome
- taking some types of antipsychotic or steroid medicines.

### What are the symptoms of type 2 diabetes?

The symptoms of type 2 diabetes can include:

- being thirsty and drinking more than usual
- going to the toilet (to pass urine) more often
- feeling tired and low on energy
- having sores or cuts that will not heal
- having blurred vision
- having frequent fungal or bacterial infections including skin infections, urinary tract infections and thrush
- having pain or tingling in the legs or feet.

These symptoms can appear slowly and often go unnoticed for a long time. Some people may not even have any symptoms! Sometimes the first sign of diabetes may be a diabetes-related complication such as a foot ulcer, heart attack or vision problem.

If you experience any of the above symptoms, please talk to your doctor. Early diagnosis and intervention can have a big impact on the management of type 2 diabetes.

### How is type 2 diabetes diagnosed?

There are three blood glucose checks that are used to diagnose type 2 diabetes:

#### **A blood glucose check sent to pathology.**

This may be done as either fasting (after having nothing to eat or drink for at least eight hours) or non-fasting.

#### **An oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT).**

You will be given a sugary drink after having a fasting blood glucose check and then have another blood glucose check one and two hours afterwards.

**A HbA1c check sent to pathology.** This reflects your average blood glucose level over the last 10 to 12 weeks. You do not need to fast for this.

### How is type 2 diabetes managed?

Type 2 diabetes can be managed with healthy eating and regular physical activity. Over time, you may also need glucose-lowering medicines such as tablets or non-insulin injectable medications to lower blood glucose levels. When type 2 diabetes progresses, some people will need insulin injections to help keep their blood glucose levels in their target range.

Research shows weight loss can slow the progression of type 2 diabetes. In some cases, this can lead to reversal or remission.

Looking after your type 2 diabetes is important for good health. It can reduce your risk of developing diabetes-related complications such as damage to the eyes, kidneys, nerves and blood vessels.

### Who can help with managing your type 2 diabetes?

Managing type 2 diabetes is a team effort involving you, your family, friends, and diabetes health professionals. Diabetes can affect many areas of your body, and there are many different diabetes health care professionals who can help you manage your diabetes, including:

- your general practitioner (GP)
- an endocrinologist or diabetologist (a diabetes specialist)
- a diabetes educator
- a diabetes nurse practitioner
- a dietitian
- an exercise physiologist
- a podiatrist
- an optometrist
- a pharmacist
- a counsellor, social worker or psychologist.

### Can type 2 diabetes be prevented or cured?

- People who are at risk of type 2 diabetes can delay and, in some cases, even prevent developing diabetes by adopting a healthy lifestyle. This includes getting regular physical activity, making healthy food choices, and maintaining a healthy weight or losing 7-10% of your weight if you are carrying excess weight.
- There is no cure for type 2 diabetes. But you can continue to lead a healthy and active life if your type 2 diabetes is well managed.



### More information and support

- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://ndss.com.au) to search for the 'Healthy food choices', 'Physical activity' and other fact sheets.
- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://ndss.com.au) to access the Ready, Set, Go -Let's move, Type 2 diabetes and me and MyDESMOND programs online and other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online.
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a diabetes educator and dietitian.
- Go to [adea.com.au](https://adea.com.au) to find a diabetes educator.
- Go to [dietitiansaustralia.org.au](https://dietitiansaustralia.org.au) or call Dietitians Australia on **1800 812 942**.
- Go to [Healthdirect.gov.au](https://Healthdirect.gov.au) to find a health service or diabetes health professional near you.



