

# Life Letter *mature*

## What you need to know about diabetes

According to The Canadian Diabetes Association, there are over two million people with diabetes in Canada. It is estimated that one third of these are not diagnosed. Seniors represent almost half of those with this disease. This number can only rise as our population ages.

**What is diabetes?** Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas to convert sugars into energy for use by our bodies. When the body can no longer produce insulin or has problems using the insulin it produces, type 2 diabetes can develop. This causes a build up of sugar in the blood and, over time, can damage the blood vessels and nerves.

If not properly treated, the following serious complications can arise:

- Blindness
- Stroke
- Kidney Failure
- Heart Disease
- Loss of blood circulation to extremities that may lead to amputation
- Erectile Dysfunction
- Nerve Damage

**Who is at risk for Diabetes?** If you are over age 40, you are at risk for type 2 diabetes. It is a very good idea to get tested at least every three years. You should get tested sooner and more often if:

- You are of Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian or African descent
- You are overweight, especially if weight is carried mostly around your middle

Your risk is even higher if you:

- Have a parent or sibling who has diabetes

- Gave birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds
- Had gestational diabetes
- Have health issues associated with diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have high cholesterol

**What are the symptoms?** While many people who have type 2 diabetes do not have any symptoms, you should see your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Frequent urination
- Unusual thirst
- Unexplained weight gain or loss
- Extreme fatigue, loss of energy
- Blurred vision
- Frequent or recurring infections
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet
- Cuts or bruises that are slow to heal

**Can diabetes be prevented?** Scientists believe that lifestyle changes can help prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes. Weight control, a healthy meal plan and physical activity are important prevention steps.

*This article is for information purposes and not intended to provide medical advice.*

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