



Type 2 diabetes Info-sheet for seniors

It is estimated that over 2 million Canadians have diabetes and of these, one third are undiagnosed. Nine out of ten people with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. Seniors represent almost 48% of the total number of people with the disease, and this number is expected to rise as Canada's population continues to age.

What are the warning signs?

Many people have diabetes for years before they're diagnosed. This is especially true for older adults, whose symptoms can be slight or not apparent at all. Symptoms include:

- unusual thirst
- frequent urination
- weight change (gain or loss)
- extreme fatigue or loss of energy
- blurred vision
- cuts and bruises that are slow to heal
- frequent or recurring infections
- tingling or numbness in hands and feet
- for men, trouble getting or maintaining an erection

Many people who have diabetes may have none of these symptoms. They may also occur in people who don't have diabetes.

The only way to be certain is to take a blood test ordered by your doctor. The Canadian Diabetes Association recommends screening every 3 years for everyone above age 40, and every year for individuals with other risk factors.

Who is at risk?

Some risk factors for diabetes cannot be altered. For example, you're at higher risk for developing type 2 diabetes if:

- you are over 40 years old
- you have a family history of diabetes
- you are of Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian or African descent
- you gave birth to a baby weighing over 4kg (9lbs) or you had gestational diabetes

You can, however, control certain other risk factors through lifestyle changes that include:

- **achieving and maintaining a healthy weight**
- **being more active**
- **having healthier eating habits**

Making these changes can also help you to:

- **lower your cholesterol**
- **lower your blood sugar level**

What is type 2 diabetes?

Insulin is produced by the body to transform sugar into energy. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body no longer produces enough insulin, or has difficulty using the insulin it produces, causing sugar to build up in the blood. Over time, this damages your blood vessels and nerves and can result in severe complications including:



- blindness
- heart disease
- stroke
- kidney failure
- erectile dysfunction
- nerve damage
- reduced blood supply to the limbs, possibly leading to amputation

Minimizing the risk...

No matter how old you are, and even if you have other risk factors, **you can prevent or delay** the onset of type 2 diabetes by making a few simple, healthy lifestyle changes:

- don't smoke
- achieve a healthy weight and maintain it
- be physically active
- limit your intake of fat and sugars
- eat regular, balanced meals that include the four food groups (grain products, vegetables and fruit, milk products, meat and alternatives)
- keep cholesterol to a minimum
- maintain a normal blood pressure

Adopting these changes can make a world of difference to your health, your independence and your quality of life, no matter what your age and condition.

Eat well!

Diet is an extremely important part of preventing and treating not only diabetes, but a number of other diseases associated with aging. For many seniors, changing lifetime eating habits can seem like a daunting task. Yet it can be fun!

Look at making the needed changes to your diet as an adventure. Learn to cook again. Prepare old dishes in new ways. Discover

foods and combinations you never dreamed of trying!

Based on *Canada's Food Guide To Healthy Eating*, here are some guidelines to help you prevent or delay diabetes symptoms:

Choose...

- **Vegetables and fruit.** Enjoy a variety. Choose dark green and orange vegetables and orange fruit more often – broccoli, spinach, squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, cantaloupes, orange juice, etc.
- **Fibre food.** Choose grain products such as whole wheat, oats, barley or rye, enriched pasta, brown rice, bran cereals, multi-grain bread; add peas, beans, barley and lentils to your favorite soups, stews and casseroles.
- **Leaner meats, low-fat.** Choose dairy products and dishes prepared with little or no fat.
- **Water.** Drink more water, especially in hot weather and during activities.

Limit...

- your intake of sugar, salt, caffeine, alcohol and soft drinks.





Be active!

Studies suggest that physical activity can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes by 50%. Start slowly... and build up gradually!

Try to accumulate 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity into your daily routine, in periods of at least 10 minutes each. *You might already be closer to this goal than you think!* Here are a few suggestions:

- do activities you are doing now more often
- walk wherever and whenever you can
- take the stairs instead of the elevator
- get up and move around more frequently, especially if you tend to sit
- find activities you enjoy that involve some physical exertion (gardening, walking, swimming, etc.)

Always consult your physician before embarking on any new physical activity program. *Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults* is a useful tool for developing an appropriate exercise program (see back page for ordering information).

If your problem is motivation, try registering for a class in your community. Or attach a pedometer to your waistbelt to record the number of steps you take daily, and challenge yourself to increase this number every day.

Regular activity helps reduce your risk of diabetes and improve your overall physical, emotional and social well being.

You've been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes?

Diabetes is a self-help disease. If you've already been diagnosed with diabetes, progression is controllable by following medical advice and a healthier lifestyle.

Don't fear the unknown – learn as much as you can about managing your diabetes by talking to your doctor or diabetes educator. You can also contact a number of organizations such as the Canadian Diabetes Association, that can provide excellent tools to help you cope with diabetes and adopt and stick to a healthy lifestyle.

Take care...

By controlling your blood sugar levels, blood pressure and cholesterol levels, you will prevent or significantly delay the damage that uncontrolled diabetes causes to your body's blood vessels.

You will also need to take special care in certain areas:

Foot care: diabetes can lower blood supply to the limbs and reduce feeling in the feet. Check your feet every day and watch for any redness or patches. Sores, blisters, breaks in the skin, infections or callus buildup should be reported right away to a podiatrist or family doctor.

Skin care: because people with diabetes may have more injuries and infections, it's important to keep skin clean, use skin softeners and take care of minor cuts and bruises.

Teeth and gums: advise your dentist that you have diabetes and schedule regular checkups. Your teeth and gums need special attention to avoid serious infections.

Eyes: advise your eye care specialist that you have diabetes and schedule eye exams according to the professional recommendation. Your eyes need special attention to alert you to any significant changes due to your condition.



Adopting a healthier lifestyle can not only prevent or control diabetes, it can significantly reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke and osteoporosis, and contribute to your overall well-being and quality of life.

For more information...

To order *Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults*:

1-888-334-9769 (toll-free)
www.paguide.com/older

To order *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*:

1-866-225-0709 (toll-free)
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e.html

Active Living Coalition for Older Adults

1-800-549-9799 (toll-free)
1-416-423-2163
www.alcoa.ca

Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging

1-519-661-1603
www.uwo.ca/actage

Canadian Diabetes Association

1-800-226-8464 (toll-free)
www.diabetes.ca

Canadian Ethnocultural Council

1-613-230-3867
www.ethnicaging.ca

Canadian Health Network

www.canadian-health-network.ca

Canadian Pensioners Concerned

1-888-822-6750 (toll-free)
1-416-368-5222
www.canpension.ca

Diabète Québec

1-800-361-3504 (toll-free)
www.diabete.qc.ca

Dieticians of Canada

1-416-596-0857
www.dieticians.ca

National Aboriginal Diabetes Association

1-877-232-6232 (toll-free)
1-204-927-1220
www.nada.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada

www.diabetes.gc.ca

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*Division of Aging and Seniors
Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines*

This info-sheet is available in alternative formats on demand

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