

# Health *capsule*

## Don't take diabetes lightly

Diabetes is a chronic, incurable disease that occurs when the body doesn't produce any or enough insulin, leading to an excess of sugar in the blood. Insulin, which is produced by the pancreas, is a hormone that helps the cells of the body use the glucose (sugar) in food. Cells need this energy in order to function properly.

If there isn't enough insulin or its function is impaired, as is the case with diabetes, the glucose (sugar) cannot be used as fuel for the cells. Sugar builds up in the bloodstream and is excreted in the urine. Eventually, the hyperglycemia (high blood sugar) caused by excessive amounts of glucose in the blood leads to a variety of complications, particularly for the eyes, kidneys, nerves, heart and blood vessels.

Even today, the cause of diabetes remains a mystery. However, we do know that certain factors can trigger the onset of the disease: heredity, obesity, pregnancy, some viruses and medications, etc.

### How many Quebecers have diabetes?

An estimated 650 000 people in Quebec have diabetes, 200 000 of whom are unaware that they have the disease. The World Health Organization predicts that the number of people with diabetes will double by 2025, making diabetes the new epidemic.

## Diabetes symptoms

The signs and symptoms of diabetes don't necessarily all present the same way or with the same intensity. For any type of diabetes, whether type 1, type 2 or gestational, it is essential to see a doctor. The symptoms include:

- fatigue, drowsiness
- frequent urination
- extreme thirst
- excessive hunger
- weight loss
- blurred vision
- cuts and bruises slow to heal
- genital infections
- tingling or numbness in hands or feet
- mood swings

## Types of diabetes

There are two main types of diabetes: type 1 and type 2. Sometimes women temporarily develop diabetes during pregnancy; this is called gestational diabetes.

### DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

**NOVEMBER IS DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH.**

**Health Capsule**  
*No. 8, 2009*



## Type 1 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes occurs mostly in children, adolescents and young adults. In type 1 diabetes, the pancreas no longer produces insulin, making type 1 diabetics dependent on daily insulin injections for their survival. At the present time, we do not know how to prevent this type of diabetes. Research is focused on uncovering the mechanisms underlying the destruction of insulin-producing cells.

## Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes occurs much later in life, generally after 40 years of age. About 90% of diabetics have this type of diabetes. In the last few years, we've noticed that this type of diabetes is occurring earlier; in some high-risk groups, it can even occur in childhood.

Aboriginals, Latino-Americans, Asians and people of African descent are more likely to develop the disease than other ethnic groups. A genetic predisposition, being overweight and a lack of exercise contribute to the onset of type 2 diabetes. Some studies suggest that a high-fat diet might also be a risk factor.

Type 2 diabetes is the stealthiest type of diabetes. The symptoms can be mild and therefore overlooked for years. Unfortunately, by the time it's diagnosed, the damage is done.

By making major lifestyle changes, it is possible to delay the onset of the disease and reduce its impact.

## Nutrition

A varied and well-balanced diet is crucial in preventing a disease like diabetes. The secret to healthy eating is to most often select low fat foods, low in salt and without added sugar, while increasing your consumption of high-fibre foods.

By following the recommendations in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, all your energy needs will be met. Diabetics also need their own individual meal plan. A dietician can provide one and also review your food habits and suggest ways to improve them.

## Exercise

Recent studies have demonstrated that even a slight increase in the amount of exercise has health benefits, especially for sedentary people. Just 30 minutes of exercise a day will suffice! When you increase the amount of exercise, you raise your metabolism. By moving more, you expend more energy. For a diabetic, this means more efficient use of the insulin injected or produced by the pancreas.

(Source : Diabetes Quebec Website : [www.diabete.qc.ca](http://www.diabete.qc.ca))

**In Quebec**  
**650 000** Quebecers  
**are diabetic but**  
**200,000 don't know it**

