



## WHAT IS DIABETES?



### What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a group of diseases characterized by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action or both. Diabetes can be associated with serious complications and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to control the disease and lower the risk of complications.

Type 1 diabetes is *juvenile-onset diabetes, which usually strikes children and young adults, who need several insulin injections a day or an insulin pump to survive. Type 1 diabetes accounts for 5 to 10 percent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes.*

Type 2 diabetes is *adult-onset diabetes and accounts for about 90-95 percent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. It usually begins as insulin resistance, a disorder in which the cells do not use insulin properly. Type 2 diabetes is associated with older age, obesity, family history of diabetes, medical history of gestational diabetes, impaired glucose tolerance, physical inactivity and race/ethnicity. The rising incidence of diabetes in the United States is the result of a dramatic increase in obesity, as well as the aging of the population. Currently, 60 percent of Americans are overweight and 25 percent are considered obese.*

Of the 17 million people who have diabetes, 6.2 percent of the population (or one third) are unaware they have the disease.

### Statistically, who is at risk?

#### Age

Less than 1 percent of people under age 20 are at risk; however, clinic-based reports and regional studies indicate that type 2 diabetes is becoming more common among Native American, African American and Hispanic children and adolescents.

8.6 percent of people older than 20 are at risk.  
20.1 percent of people older than 65 are at risk.

#### Gender

8.3 percent of men are at risk.  
8.9 percent of women are at risk.

#### Race/ethnicity (Over 20 years old)

Non-Hispanic whites: 7.8 percent are at risk.

Non-Hispanic blacks: 13 percent are at risk.

Hispanic/Latino Americans: 10.2 percent are at risk.

American Indians and Alaska Natives: 15.1 percent of those receiving care from the Indian Health Service are at risk. At the regional level, diabetes is least common among Alaska Natives (5.3 percent) and most common among American Indians in the southwestern United States (25.7 percent).

### Complications from diabetes

Vision impairment is a frequent complication of both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness among adults 20-74 years old. Diabetic retinopathy causes from 12,000 to 24,000 new cases of blindness each year.

*(Information provided by the American Diabetes Association.)*