

What causes diabetes?

Diabetes is caused by two factors

1. A genetic tendency for the body to resist the work of insulin (insulin resistance) to put glucose into the cells for it to use or store it in the form of fat. The glucose stays in the blood and cause damage to kidneys, heart, and arteries that carry the blood to all our body, especially to our fingers and toes. Our body breaks down the food that we eat into glucose, which it burns for our body to function.
2. A lifestyle that does not get much exercise, eat unhealthy foods, and overweight make insulin resistance worse.

Type 2 diabetes is becoming more common as our lifestyles changed from a subsistence lifestyle (hunting and gathering) that require a lot of physical work and the food we ate did not have sweets and some types of fats that are common now. When our lifestyles changed to a more sedentary life, we exercise less for our food and eat more sweets, “junk food” and we tend to get overweight. These are risk factors for getting diabetes. Other risk factors are:

1. Obesity (overweight)
2. Family history of diabetes or pre-diabetic
3. Past history of gestational diabetes (pregnant woman getting diabetes)
4. Past history of high blood glucose (greater than 200 mg/dl)
5. Age 40 or over
6. Native American/Alaska Native
7. Sedentary (inactive) lifestyle
8. Smoking
9. Hypertension (high blood pressure)
10. High cholesterol
11. Stress

The last four risk factors also contribute to the development of cardiovascular disease and is compounded by diabetes complications for heart attack, strokes and poor blood circulation to the fingers and toes of our bodies.

The signs and symptoms of diabetes are caused by high glucose in the blood.
Warning – Sometimes there are no symptoms and we feel good.

Signs and Symptoms of diabetes may include:

1. Increased thirst, amount of urine, appetite (hungry)
2. Blurred vision

3. Frequent yeast infections, bladder infection, gum infection in the mouth.
4. Slow healing of sores/cuts, especially on the feet.
5. Weakness and tiredness
6. Unexplained weight loss
7. Sexually difficulty, especially impotence in men
8. Irritable and depression

Type 2 diabetes causes serious health problems, such as heart attacks, amputations, kidney failure, loss of eyesight, and strokes. The cost of these health problems are; great personal suffering, financial burden, and disruption of family life.

Due to the major effects on people's lives and the high cost of treatment, diabetes can and must be prevented in the first place by not becoming overweight, exercise at least 30 minutes per day and eat healthy foods. (Do not eat foods with high calories and little food value such as soda pop, chips, candy, and bakery goods.)

Exercise by walking, jogging, snowshoeing, biking, playing basketball, rollerblading, cross-country skiing, and exercising to aerobic videotapes – Rez Robics.

We can learn diabetes prevention and teach our families about weight control, exercise and healthy eating habits. Talk with your health providers and they can help you get in contact with your diabetes program. Many programs have diabetes educators, nutritionist/dietitians, and fitness specialist who are there to help us not get diabetes. Another prevention tool is to get yearly screenings after the age of 40.

Okay now that we know about type 2 diabetes we need to support each other about preventing it. We need to support family members who have diabetes and are told by their nutritionist that they need to cut back on their portion size, but at our meals we encourage them to eat more, or offer high caloric foods, instead of fruits and vegetables.

Source: Diabetes Prevention and Care in the Villages of Alaska, Alaska Native Medical Center Diabetes Program, 1999