

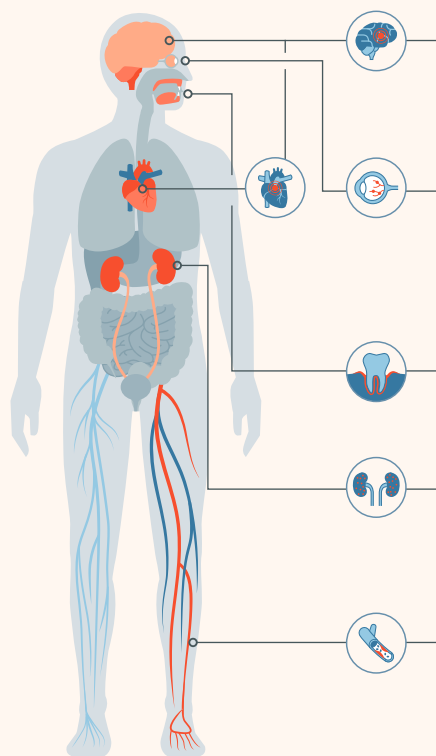
Diabetes: Preventing Complications



If you have been diagnosed with diabetes, you are not alone. In the United States, 38 million adults have diabetes. Diabetes is a chronic (long-lasting) condition that affects how the body turns the food you eat into energy. If you have diabetes, sugar (or glucose) in the bloodstream is not broken down correctly. Instead of being used by your body for energy, excess sugars move through the bloodstream, which leads to high blood sugar levels. Over time, the high blood sugar

levels damage blood vessels, nerves, and other body parts.

Complications from high blood sugar levels happen gradually. These problems may develop faster if blood sugar is not well controlled or if you have had diabetes for a long time. If you have questions about whether you have diabetes or questions about your treatment plan, please call or visit your doctor.



Diabetes can damage the blood vessels of the brain (“cerebrovascular disease”) or heart (“cardiovascular disease”). Adults with diabetes are twice as likely to have a stroke or heart attack compared to adults without diabetes.

The tiny blood vessels and nerves in a person’s eyes can be damaged over time. This can lead to vision loss or even blindness. Early on, there are few to no symptoms. With later stages of disease, a person may notice blurred vision, dark spots or “holes,” flashes of light, floaters, or poor night vision.

Diabetes increases a person’s risk for gum disease. At first, this presents as swollen, bleeding, or receding gums but can result in tooth loss over time.

Diabetes increases a person’s risk for kidney disease because it damages the tiny blood vessels in the kidneys. Although there are few symptoms at first, this can lead to kidney failure if left untreated.

When nerves are damaged by diabetes, this is called “neuropathy.” This can present as numbness, a tingling or burning feeling, or a reduced ability to feel pain or temperature changes. Usually, this is experienced in the hands or feet and noticed more at night.

There are many steps you can take to manage your diabetes. These include:

- **Keeping up to date with your doctor** appointments and health screenings.
- **Keeping track of your blood glucose levels** if your doctor asks you to do so. This can include checking your blood sugar at home and writing down your daily values. There are also apps for your phone that can help you keep track of your numbers.
- **Making lifestyle changes.** Some people with diabetes need to change what they eat and get more exercise. Talk to your doctor before making these changes.
- **Keeping your blood sugar under control** by taking medications prescribed by your doctor for diabetes.

PREVENT OR DELAY DIABETES COMPLICATIONS

Early on, most diabetes complications have few to no symptoms. This is why regular screening is so important! Screenings help identify problems before you start to feel sick. If your doctor finds an issue, they can help you prevent or delay serious problems. Some screenings can be done at home, but others need to be done by a healthcare provider. See below for a list of ways you can prevent or delay diabetes complications.



EYE Health

- Every year, get a dilated eye exam from an eye doctor (an optometrist or an ophthalmologist). This helps your eye doctor identify problems early on when there are more treatment options available.
- Tell your doctor if you have any cloudy or blurred vision, dark spots or “holes,” flashes of light, floaters, seeing double, poor night vision, or any sudden changes in vision.



MOUTH Health

- Brush your teeth at least twice every day and floss daily.
- See a dentist two times each year.



HEART AND BRAIN Health

- If you have been prescribed a medication to lower your cholesterol, make sure you take it every day. This will reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke.
- Make sure your doctor checks your cholesterol each year.



KIDNEY Health

- Your doctor will perform tests to check your kidney health.
 - ✓ A urine test, which will look for protein in the urine (typically this test is called a “urine albumin-to-creatinine-ratio”). People with healthy kidneys have little to no protein in their urine. If there is protein in a person’s urine, this can be an early sign of kidney disease.
 - ✓ A blood test to measure the kidneys’ glomerular filtration rate (GFR) tells your doctor how well your kidneys are cleaning the blood and removing waste in the urine. Lower GFR values mean the kidneys may not be working well.
- Your doctor may suggest that you see a nephrologist (kidney doctor).
- Ask your doctor if you are taking all the right medications, some of which can help slow the progression of kidney disease and keep you healthy.



NERVE AND FOOT Health

- Every year, get a complete foot exam. This is done by your primary care provider or a foot specialist (podiatrist).
- Examine your feet every day. Keep an eye on any cuts or scrapes and let your doctor know if any are getting worse. This habit helps reduce infections, which can lead to complications, including limb loss.
- Protect your feet. Always wear moisture-absorbing socks in cushioned shoes. Never go barefoot. Ask your doctor whether you qualify for therapeutic shoes for diabetes.



It’s normal to have questions about diabetes and its possible complications.

Your Healthmap Solutions Care Navigation team member is available to answer your questions and help make sure you keep up with any health screenings or tests you may need. For help with your diabetes care goals, call the Healthmap Care Navigation team at **1-800-481-0474**.