

Diabetes and your health

# Living with diabetes as an older adult



# Diabetes and the older adult

Older adults are at increased risk for diabetes, particularly type 2 diabetes. Understanding the effects of diabetes on the body may help prevent additional health problems. For example:

- Signs of low blood sugar
- Health issues that may be related to diabetes

Managing your diabetes may seem like a lot to handle, but by working with your healthcare providers, you may help prevent some health problems.



## Recognizing hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia (HI-po-gly-SEE-me-uh), or low blood sugar, happens when your blood sugar becomes too low. Often some action is needed to return the blood sugar level to 70mg/dL. It may occur more often in older adults for several reasons, such as taking certain medications, side effects from medicines, unplanned exercise, or poor eating habits.

Signs of low blood sugar in older people may be different than those in younger people. They can often be missed or blamed on something else. That's why it's important to know what signs to look for as well as understand what your own symptoms feel like during a hypoglycemic event. Talk with your healthcare provider about other signs of low blood sugar.

### Some signs of low blood sugar are:

Feeling shaky

Dizziness

Sweating

Hunger

Headache

Confusion



Talk with your healthcare provider about hypoglycemia and things you can do to treat it.

# Other concerns in older adults

**Taking many medicines** raises the chances of side effects. Some medicines may affect the way other medicines work.

Below are some things you can do to help prevent issues with your medicines:

- Keep track of your medicines and know why you take each one.
- Tell all your healthcare providers about all the medicines you take.
- Talk with your healthcare providers about ways to manage side effects.

## **People with diabetes may be at greater risk for depression.**

Depression can be hard to notice, especially in older adults.

Some signs of depression in older adults are:

- Changes in memory
- Unusual body aches or pain
- Changes in sleep or eating

**Loss of bladder control** (or urinary incontinence) is common in older adults with diabetes, especially women.

**Nerve pain** can be a problem due to damaged nerves (called neuropathy). It is caused by high blood sugar levels that last for a long period of time.



## **Talking with your healthcare provider**

It is important to be open and honest with your healthcare provider. Bring a list of any questions you may have to your next appointment, such as:

- What other health issues should I be looking for?
- How can I help to prevent problems related to diabetes?
- What foot problems should I be looking for? Can you examine my feet today?
- What were the results of my last eye exam (or any other last test)?

Read more information in the chart on page 4 and list your questions on page 5.



# Diabetes and your body

Diabetes may affect more than just blood sugar levels. It increases the chances for health problems with other parts of your body. It may be uncomfortable to think about these health conditions. You can take steps to stay healthy if you know the signs and symptoms to watch out for. Having diabetes may increase your chances of other health conditions, but not everyone with diabetes gets all the health conditions listed below:

Body part	Health issue
 Brain	Problems with memory or thinking
 Eyes	Blindness, clouding of the eye (cataract), increased pressure in the eye (glaucoma), and other eye problems
 Ears	Hearing loss and other hearing issues
 Mouth	Gum disease and other problems in your mouth
 Heart	Heart disease, heart attack, and stroke
 Kidneys	Kidney disease that can cause damage or failure over time
 Feet	Foot infections, reduced sensation, amputation, and other foot problems
 Nerves	Nerve damage that can cause numbness/loss of feeling in the hands or feet and sexual problems in men

# Keeping track of your health

The following chart may help you keep track of any health issues you may have. There are extra rows below to add any other health concerns. Ask a caregiver or family member for help. Share the information below with your healthcare provider at your next visit.

Health issue	Date first noticed	Symptoms	How it makes you feel (Rate from 1 "Not bad" to 5 "Terrible")	Blood sugar level	Notes/concerns
<b>Example:</b> Low blood sugar	May 4	Often feel shaky in the mid-afternoon	3	60 mg/dL	Feel better after having some crackers but need to be more consistent with my meals
Blurred vision					
Numbness in hands/feet					
More frequent falls					
Trouble hearing					
Trouble remembering things					
Dental issues					



## You may help prevent some of these health issues by:

- Managing your health as instructed by your physician/healthcare provider/doctor
- Taking your medicines as recommended by your healthcare team
- Losing weight and leading a healthy lifestyle
- Regularly seeing your healthcare provider



## Learn more about diabetes and aging

Check out these organizations for more information about diabetes and aging:

**American Diabetes Association (ADA):**  
[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

**ADA Diabetes Resources for Older Adults:**  
[www.diabetes.org/older-adults](http://www.diabetes.org/older-adults)  
1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2383)

**Healthy Aging:**  
[www.healthinaging.org](http://www.healthinaging.org)  
212-308-1414