



Diabetes and Family Health History



What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic condition in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone needed to convert sugars and starches into energy for the body. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to kidney failure, heart disease, eye problems and nerve damage.

Why is Family History Important?

Diabetes tends to run in families. A person with a family history of diabetes is 2-4 times as likely to develop diabetes as someone without a family history. Your family's ancestry is also important. African American, Hispanic, and Native American families have a higher risk of diabetes.

Look for these "red flags" in your family:

- ◆ Many affected family members
- ◆ A brother or sister with diabetes
- ◆ One or both parents with diabetes

There are also other risk factors. Look for these "red flags" in your personal history:

- ◆ Diabetes during pregnancy
- ◆ A baby who weighed 9 pounds or more at birth
- ◆ High blood pressure
- ◆ High cholesterol
- ◆ Overweight
- ◆ Too little physical activity

What Can You Do?

KNOW your family history. Talk to your relatives and find out if anyone has had diabetes. Even though you can't change your family history, there are steps you can take that may prevent or delay the onset of disease.

If you have a family history of diabetes:

- ◆ Tell your health care provider
- ◆ Ask what screenings are recommended, then be sure to get them done
- ◆ Maintain a healthy weight— if you are overweight or obese, losing just 5-7% of your body weight decreases your risk of diabetes by more than 50%!
- ◆ Get more physical activity
- ◆ Have regular doctor visits
- ◆ Choose a healthy diet— with at least 2 ½ cups of brightly colored vegetables and 2 cups of fruit a day

Diabetes cannot always be prevented, but if detected early, there are many new and effective treatments. **If you have been diagnosed with diabetes**, share your health history with family members. Encourage them to follow through with recommended screenings and make healthy lifestyle choices to reduce their risk of diabetes.

For More Information



American Diabetes Association
www.Diabetes.org

Michigan Diabetes Outreach Network
www.diabetesinmichigan.org

Michigan's Genetics Resource Center
www.MIGeneticsConnection.org