I have been told that I have type 2 diabetes. What does this mean in terms of my health, diet, and lifestyle?

Getting any diagnosis can be overwhelming and scary. This pamphlet is designed to answer some of your basic questions about type 2 diabetes. At your next appointment, we can review the pamphlet and discuss your specific questions in more detail.

**What is type 2 diabetes?**

Since being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, you are probably surprised to find that some of your relatives, friends, and colleagues either have diabetes or know someone with diabetes.

Being diabetic basically means that your blood glucose level (blood sugar level) is higher than normal.

- Normal: <100 mg/dL
- Pre-diabetes: 100-125 mg/dL
- Diabetes: >126 mg/dL

Diabetes develops when your body begins to have trouble processing insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to transport glucose—your body’s energy source—into the cells via the bloodstream. If you don’t have enough insulin or if you’re insulin resistant, you can build up too much glucose in your blood, leading to higher-than-normal blood glucose levels.

**Will I need insulin/medication?**

People with type 2 diabetes do not always have to take insulin or medications right away; however, the longer you have type 2 diabetes, or the higher your blood glucose level is, the greater the likelihood that you will require medication or insulin. A discussion of specific medications will be reviewed at your next appointment.

There are things that you can do to help control your disease, however. One of the most effective ways to control your blood glucose levels is to change certain habits. The American Diabetes Association recommends the following lifestyle changes:

- **Eat well:** Create meals that consist of fresh fruits and vegetables (including leafy greens), avoid excessive starches (carbohydrates), and eat lean proteins (chicken and fish). The goal is to control your blood glucose level and keep it in the healthy, normal range. For more information on helpful meal plans, go to diabeticlifestyle.com.

- **Exercise:** The goal is to exercise at least 30 minutes per day five days per week. You can begin slowly, and work your way up to 30 minutes over the course of a week or two. The benefits of exercise are dramatic. Exercise can lower your blood glucose level, and make you less insulin resistant.

- **Lose weight:** If you’re overweight, you should get started on a weight-loss program. The combination of eating well and exercising is a great way to lose weight.

**Know your risks!**

We are not sure exactly what causes the insulin process to go awry in some people. However, contributing to the development of your diabetes are certain risk factors:

- **Weight**
  - Being overweight, especially if you carry a lot of extra weight in your abdomen—rather than your hips—increases your risk. These extra fat cells can cause your body to become more insulin resistant.

- **Lack of physical activity**
  - Not exercising often goes hand in hand with being overweight. If you aren’t physically active, you’re more likely to develop diabetes.

- **Family history**
  - Diabetes tends to run in families, so if someone in your family has (or had) it, you are more likely to develop diabetes.

- **Race/ethnicity**
  - Certain ethnic groups are more likely to develop diabetes, including African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans.

- **Age**
  - The older you are, the more at risk you are for developing type 2 diabetes. At age 45, your risk starts to rise, and after age 65, your risk increases exponentially.

- **Gestational diabetes**
  - If you developed diabetes while you were pregnant, that increases your risk for developing diabetes later on.

- **Other health problems**
  - High blood pressure (hypertension) and high cholesterol increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

**Additional Resources:**

- [Diabeticlifestyle.com](http://www.diabeticlifestyle.com) for more on meal plans, exercise tips, and treatments
- [Endocrineweb.com](http://www.endocrineweb.com)
- American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE): [www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org)

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