



MDwise

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Type 1 Diabetes

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Topic Overview

Is this topic for you?

This topic covers type 1 diabetes, including information about symptoms, tests, and home treatment. For specific information about children who have type 1 diabetes, see the topic [Type 1 Diabetes: Children Living With the Disease](#).

What is type 1 diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes happens when your pancreas (See figure 1 in appendix) stops making insulin.

Insulin is a hormone that helps the body's cells use sugar (glucose) for energy. It also helps the body store extra energy in muscle, fat, and liver cells. Without insulin, this sugar can't get into your cells to do its work. It stays in your blood instead. And then your blood sugar level gets too high.

High blood sugar can harm many parts of the body (See figure 2 in appendix), such as the eyes, heart, blood vessels, nerves, and kidneys. It can also increase your risk for other health problems (complications).

Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age, but it usually starts in children or young adults. That's why it used to be called juvenile diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is different from type 2 diabetes. In type 1 diabetes, the body stops making insulin. In type 2, the body can't use insulin the right way. Over time with type 2, the body doesn't make enough insulin.

There isn't a cure for type 1 diabetes. But with treatment, people can live long and healthy lives.

What causes type 1 diabetes?

The body makes insulin in beta cells, which are in a part of the pancreas called the islet (say "EYE-let") tissue.

Type 1 diabetes starts because the body destroys those beta cells. Experts don't know why this happens.

Some people have a greater chance of getting type 1 diabetes because they have a parent, brother, or sister who has it. But most people with the illness don't have a family history.

Other things that increase the risk of getting type 1 diabetes are being white and having islet cell antibodies in the blood.

What are the symptoms of undiagnosed type 1 diabetes?

Symptoms of diabetes are:

- Being very thirsty.
- Urinating a lot.
- Losing weight without trying.
- Being hungrier than usual (sometimes).
- Blurry eyesight.

These symptoms usually appear over a few days to weeks. Sometimes people notice symptoms after an illness, like the flu. They may think that the diabetes symptoms are because of the flu, so they don't seek medical care soon enough.

If you wait too long to get medical care, you may get diabetic ketoacidosis, which is very dangerous.

Symptoms of this problem include:

- Flushed, hot, dry skin.
- Not feeling hungry.
- Belly pain.
- Vomiting.
- A strong, fruity breath odor.
- Fast and shallow breathing.
- Restlessness, drowsiness, or trouble waking up.
- Confusion.

How is type 1 diabetes diagnosed?

Your doctor can diagnose diabetes with a physical exam, your medical history, and blood tests.

Some people are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes because they have symptoms of diabetic ketoacidosis.

How is it treated?

Treatment for type 1 diabetes focuses on keeping blood sugar levels within a target range and doing things to reduce complications. To control your blood sugar, you:

- Take insulin.
- Eat a healthy diet that spreads carbohydrates throughout the day.
- Check blood sugar levels several times a day.
- Get regular exercise.

What are the complications from diabetes?

High blood sugar can lead to problems such as:

- Hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis). This can cause heart disease, heart attack, or stroke.
- Diabetic retinopathy. This is a type of eye disease that can lead to vision loss.
- Diabetic nephropathy. This kidney disease has no early symptoms, but it can lead to kidney failure.
- Diabetic neuropathy. This is a nerve disease that can affect your internal organs as well as your ability to sense touch and pain, especially in your feet. It can also cause sexual problems.

Credits

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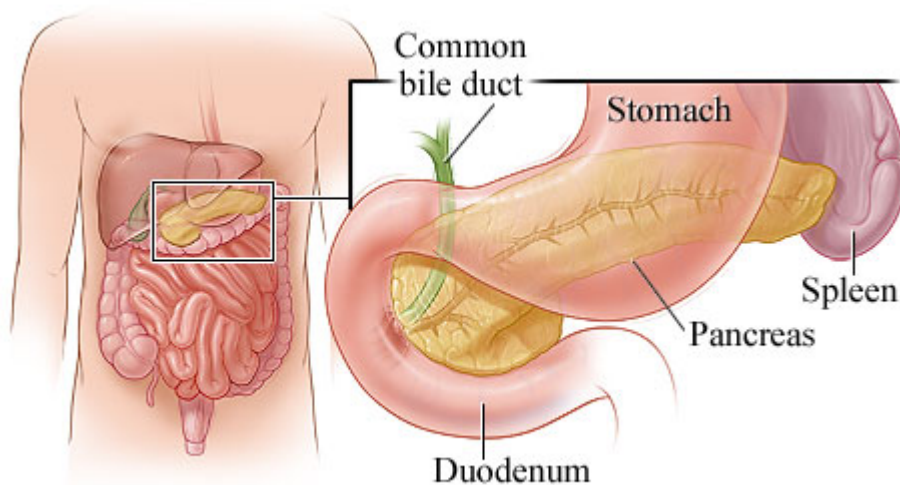
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Appendix

Topic Images

Figure 1

Pancreas

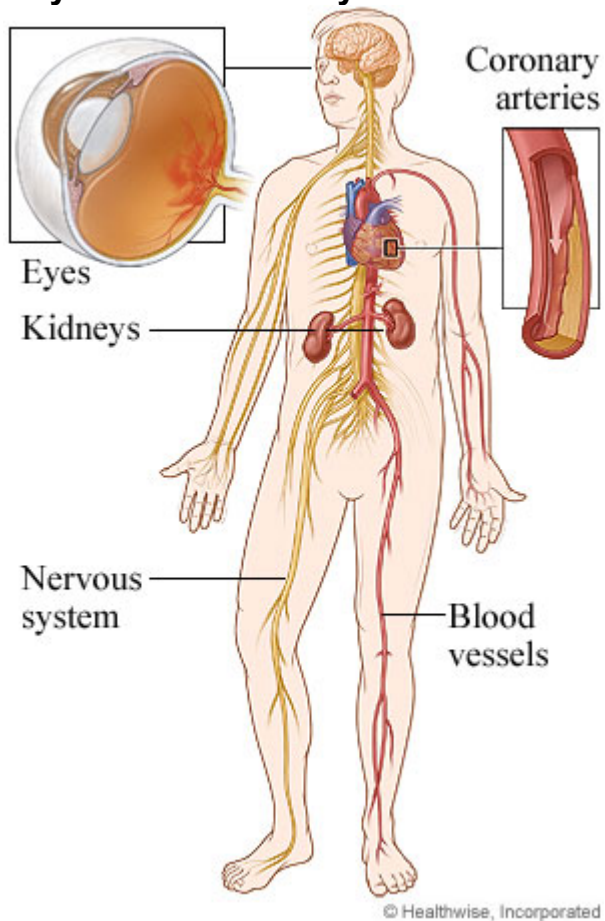


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The pancreas is an organ in the upper belly, behind the stomach and close to the spine. It makes digestive enzymes that your body uses to break down and process food. The pancreas also makes insulin, the hormone that regulates sugar (glucose) in the blood.

Figure 2

Body areas affected by diabetes



Diabetes can affect many areas in the body. The eyes, arteries, kidneys, nervous system and blood vessels can all be affected.

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