



American Heart Association®

Life's Essential 8™

→ for kids

SWEET TALK

You probably know that sugars are in the foods we eat, like candy, cakes and cookies, but sugars or carbohydrates are also in other foods like bread, pasta, rice and potatoes. Eating too much sugar can be bad for our blood vessels, liver, kidneys, and other organs.¹

When we eat carbohydrates and sugars, glucose (sugar) enters the bloodstream. Blood glucose, or blood sugar, is like the fuel that gives our bodies energy, just like a car needs gasoline to run.

To make sure our bodies have enough energy, our pancreas, which is a special part inside us, releases a hormone called insulin. Insulin acts like a key that unlocks our body's cells to let the glucose in and do its job. Sometimes, our bodies may not make enough insulin or have trouble using it properly. This can make our blood glucose levels go too high or too low. In people with diabetes, their pancreas doesn't make enough insulin, or their body has trouble using it. It's like having a door that doesn't open easily or a key that doesn't work well. This means that the glucose can't get inside the cells as it should, and it stays in the blood instead.

There are two main types of diabetes: **type 1 diabetes** and **type 2 diabetes**.

- **Type 1 diabetes** is when the pancreas doesn't make enough insulin at all. It's like the pancreas forgot how to make the key to open the cells. People with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin every day to help their bodies use glucose properly. They might need to use a special device called an insulin pen or insulin pump to give themselves insulin.
- **Type 2 diabetes** is when the body has trouble using insulin or doesn't make enough of it. It's like the key is there, but it doesn't work as well as it should to unlock the cells. People with type 2 diabetes should focus on eating healthy foods, being active, and sometimes taking medicine or insulin to help their bodies use the glucose properly.



TRACK LEVELS

Your doctor can check your blood and measure the glucose levels to determine if you have diabetes. If you're diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, you will need to monitor your blood sugar levels regularly and your doctor may give you medications. Not treating diabetes can harm your kidneys, liver, nerves, eyes, heart, eyes and other parts of your body.²

Visit [KnowDiabetesbyHeart.org](https://www.heart.org/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/2015-dietary-guidelines) to learn how to manage your risk for heart disease and stroke if you have diabetes.



¹Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Carbohydrates and Blood Sugar <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/carbohydrates-and-blood-sugar/>

²American Heart Association, The connection between diabetes, kidney disease and high blood pressure

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