



DIABETES *facts* SHEET

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a lifelong condition where your body does not produce enough insulin, or your body cannot use the insulin it produces. Your body needs insulin to change the sugar from food into energy. When you don't have enough insulin, the sugar stays in your blood so that your "blood sugar level" gets too high. High blood sugar levels over long periods of time can cause complications such as: damage to blood vessels, kidneys, and difficulties with circulation.

There are three main types of diabetes: **type 1**, where the body makes little or no insulin; **type 2**, where the body makes insulin but cannot use it properly; and **gestational diabetes**, where the body is not able to properly use insulin during pregnancy. This type of diabetes goes away after the baby is born. Nine out of ten people with diabetes have type 2.

Aboriginal people in Canada are at greater risk for developing type 2 diabetes than other Canadians. Aboriginal children are also now being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a condition that in the past occurred mainly in older persons. Inuit rates of diabetes are not as high as other Aboriginal populations, however there is fear that the rates of type 2 diabetes are increasing among Inuit as well.

Many years ago, diabetes was not a concern for Aboriginal people. In earlier times, Aboriginal people needed to be very active in order to survive, and they also ate traditional foods. Some people think that the change in lifestyle for Aboriginal people has caused people to be less active and eat different foods. The sudden change of lifestyle puts Aboriginal people at a greater risk for developing diabetes than other Canadians.

For more information, or to be tested for diabetes, contact your health care provider.

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Aboriginal *Diabetes* Initiative

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For more information please visit www.healthcanada.ca/diabetes

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