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Health Corner: Understanding Diabetes, Part 1: What is Diabetes?

When you eat, your body changes food to blood sugar (called blood glucose) so that your body gets the energy it needs to work.

Having diabetes means your body isn't getting the energy it needs. The problem can be that the pancreas isn't making enough insulin, a hormone that helps the cells take in blood sugar, or that the cells can't work with the insulin the body makes. Insulin is like a key that "unlocks" cells so they can take in the blood sugar they need.

Diabetes is a chronic health problem, which means it is lifelong. There is no cure for diabetes, but it can be managed to keep you healthy and feeling well. There are two main types of diabetes. Type 1 Diabetes most often begins in childhood, but adults may also develop it. In type 1, the body isn't making any insulin to help the cells take in the blood sugar they need. Type 2 diabetes typically begins late in life. In Type 2, either your body isn't making enough insulin or your cells won't accept the insulin your body makes (called insulin resistance). This means that blood sugar (glucose) can't enter the cells. Type 2 is the most common form of diabetes.

Type 1 diabetics must take insulin, and some type 2 diabetics must do so too.

A third type of diabetes, called gestational diabetes, affects pregnant women. This form of diabetes usually ends when the baby is delivered, but it can increase the risk of getting type 2 diabetes later in your life. This is a serious problem and should be treated. Gestational diabetes can cause your baby to grow and make delivery harder. It can also cause your baby to suffer respiratory distress syndrome, jaundice and have a greater risk for type 2 diabetes later in life.

Credits: Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation