

Spotting early signs of type 2 diabetes and what to do



Type 2 diabetes develops slowly. Unlike sudden illness, the symptoms creep in over months or years. Tiredness is blamed on a busy lifestyle. Extra trips to the bathroom are brushed off as drinking more water. Weight gain around the waist can be dismissed as “**middle age spread.**”

Because the signs overlap with everyday changes, **many people don't realise their body is struggling with blood sugar regulation.** By the time symptoms are clear, blood sugar may already be causing damage to blood vessels, nerves, and organs. It's also common to have no symptoms at all, making it even more difficult to catch early.

Catching it early makes a big difference. With the right support, **type 2 diabetes can often be controlled, and sometimes even put into remission,** through lifestyle changes and treatment.

What type 2 diabetes is

Type 2 diabetes happens when the body either doesn't make enough insulin or doesn't use it properly. **Insulin is the hormone that moves sugar from the blood into the cells for energy.** Without it working well, sugar builds up in the bloodstream.

Over time, high blood sugar damages blood vessels and nerves. That's why type 2 diabetes raises the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney problems, and sight loss. But with early diagnosis, these risks can be reduced significantly.

The early signs to watch for

Some of the earliest symptoms are subtle. Others may feel too minor to raise with a GP, but together they can point towards type 2 diabetes.

Symptom	Why it happens
Constant tiredness	Sugar isn't getting into cells for energy, leaving you feeling drained.
Increased thirst	High blood sugar pulls water from tissues, triggering thirst.
Needing to urinate often	The body tries to flush excess sugar through urine.
Blurred vision	Extra sugar changes the fluid balance in the eyes, affecting focus.
Slow-healing cuts	High sugar damages blood vessels, making healing slower.
Frequent infections	Weakened immunity makes infections (thrush, UTIs, skin infections) more common.
Weight gain around the waist	Insulin resistance encourages fat storage in the abdomen.

Not everyone will have all these signs. Some people may only notice one or two. That's why blood tests are so important for anyone at higher risk.

Why these symptoms matter

It's easy to explain away tiredness, thirst, or blurred vision. **But ignoring them allows damage to build up silently.** Uncontrolled diabetes can affect nearly every system in the body, from heart health to nerves in the feet.

The sooner it's identified, the sooner steps can be taken to bring blood sugar under control. Even small changes, like increasing daily activity or adjusting diet, can make a big difference in the early stages.



Who is most at risk

Anyone can develop type 2 diabetes, but some people are more likely to experience it.

Risk factors include:

- Having a parent or sibling with type 2 diabetes.
- Being overweight, especially carrying weight around the waist.
- Being over 45 (though younger people are increasingly affected).
- Having high blood pressure or raised cholesterol.
- Having polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).
- A history of gestational diabetes in pregnancy.
- Being from a South Asian, African-Caribbean, or Black African background, where risk is higher.

Having risk factors doesn't mean you will definitely develop type 2 diabetes, but it does make paying attention to early signs even more important.

How to get tested

Some patients have a blood test because they have symptoms of concern, others will have a screening blood test every year, due to falling into a higher risk category. **If you notice possible symptoms, the next step is a simple blood test.** Your GP may check:

- **Fasting blood sugar** – measures sugar levels after not eating overnight.
- **HbA1c** – shows average blood sugar levels over the past 2–3 months.
- **Oral glucose tolerance test** – measures how your body handles sugar after a sweet drink.

These tests are quick and can confirm whether you have diabetes, prediabetes (where blood sugar is raised but not high enough to be diabetes), or normal levels. Prediabetes is a vital warning sign, because **lifestyle changes at this stage can often prevent type 2 diabetes from developing.**



What to do if you're diagnosed

A diagnosis can feel overwhelming, but type 2 diabetes is manageable. The key is learning how to balance lifestyle with medical support.

- **Medication** – some people need tablets such as metformin to help the body use insulin better. Others may eventually need insulin injections, but this is less common early on.
 - **Lifestyle support** – changes to diet, physical activity, and weight management are the foundation of care. In some cases, they can bring blood sugar back into a healthy range without long-term medication.
 - **Regular monitoring** – checking blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol helps track progress and prevent complications.
 - **Specialist input** – dietitians, diabetes nurses, and eye specialists may all play a part in ongoing care.
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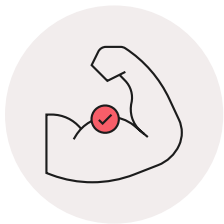
Everyday steps that make a difference

Managing or preventing type 2 diabetes isn't about strict rules. It's about consistent, supportive habits.



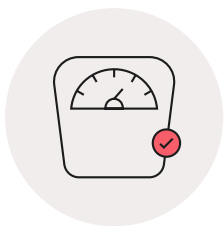
Food choices

- Favour wholegrains, vegetables, and lean proteins.
- Reduce sugary drinks and highly processed foods.
- Watch portion sizes, especially for starchy carbs like bread, pasta, and rice.



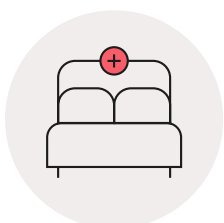
Movement

- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity a week (brisk walking, cycling, swimming).
- Strength training twice a week helps improve insulin sensitivity.
- Even short bursts of movement, standing, stretching, climbing stairs, add up.



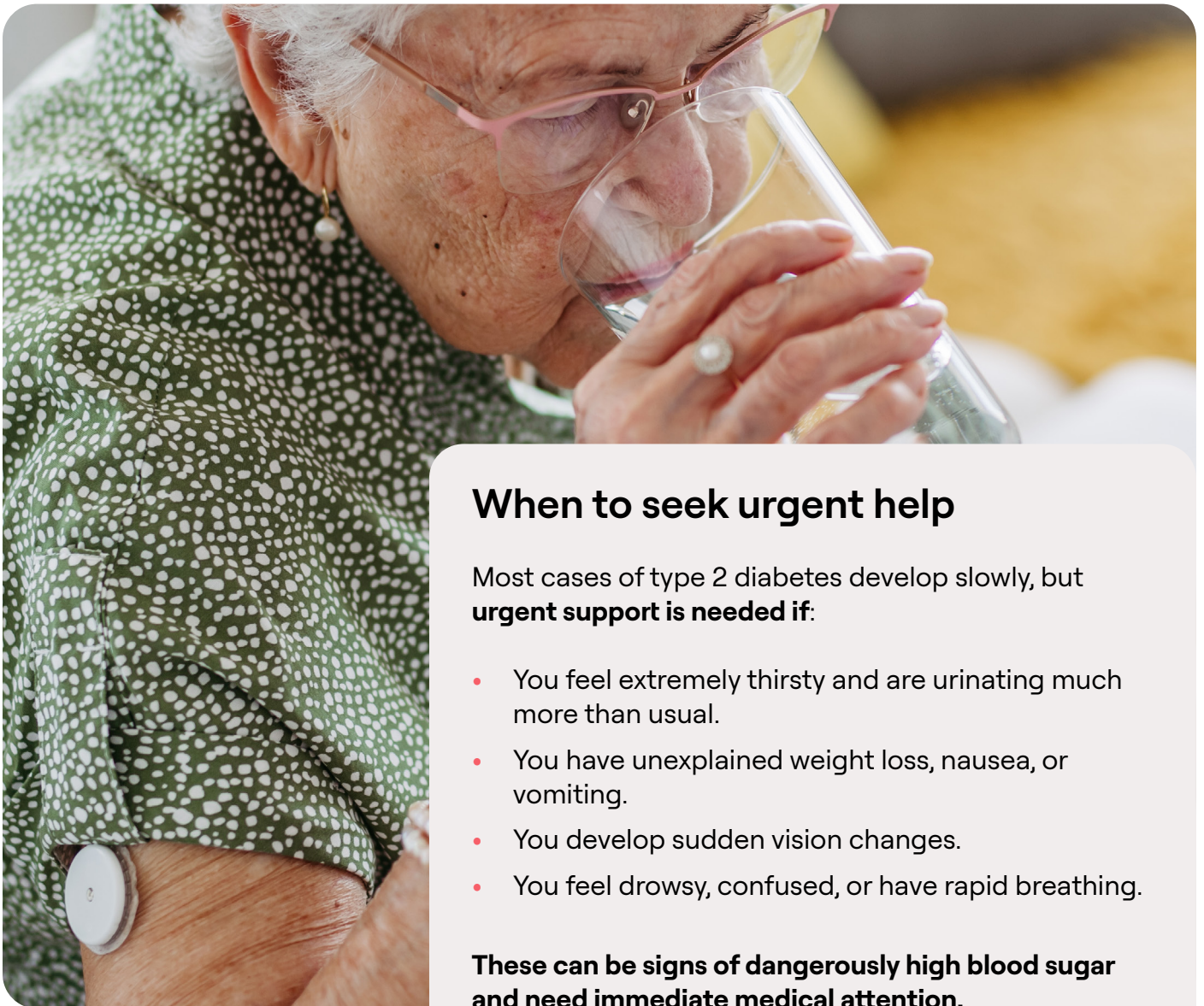
Weight management

- Losing even 5–10% of body weight can improve blood sugar control.
- Focus on gradual, sustainable changes rather than quick fixes.



Sleep and stress

- Poor sleep and chronic stress raise blood sugar levels.
- Relaxation techniques such as yoga, mindfulness, or breathing exercises can help.



When to seek urgent help

Most cases of type 2 diabetes develop slowly, but **urgent support is needed if:**

- You feel extremely thirsty and are urinating much more than usual.
- You have unexplained weight loss, nausea, or vomiting.
- You develop sudden vision changes.
- You feel drowsy, confused, or have rapid breathing.

These can be signs of dangerously high blood sugar and need immediate medical attention.

How HealthHero can help

With **HealthHero**, you can book an online GP consultation quickly and confidentially. A doctor can:

- Assess your symptoms and arrange blood tests.
- Discuss treatment options, including lifestyle support and medication.
- Provide reassurance and ongoing guidance.

You don't have to manage concerns alone or wait weeks for an appointment. Taking action now can protect your long-term health.