

Early signs of type 2 diabetes most people overlook

Type 2 diabetes often develops slowly, and the early signs can be easy to put down to being busy, tired or getting older.

Feeling thirstier. Going to the loo more often. Tiredness you cannot explain. On their own, none of these might seem like much which is how type 2 diabetes can go unnoticed for years.

Many people have no symptoms at all in the early stages. Others notice changes but put them down to something else. But finding out early can make a real difference.

This guide covers the early signs people can overlook, why there are often no symptoms at all, and when to ask a doctor about testing. Whatever the result, knowing where you stand gives you options.





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What is type 2 diabetes?

Your body uses glucose, a type of sugar carried in your blood, for energy. Insulin is a hormone that helps move glucose from your blood into your cells.

With type 2 diabetes, your body does not respond to insulin as well as it should. Over time, it may also stop making enough insulin. This causes glucose to build up in your blood rather than moving into your cells.

Type 2 diabetes usually develops gradually, over years. High blood sugar can damage blood vessels and nerves before you feel unwell, which is why it can affect your eyes, feet, heart and kidneys.

There is also a stage before type 2 diabetes called prediabetes. This is when blood sugar is higher than usual but not yet in the diabetes range. Finding it early can give you an opportunity to lower your blood sugar and reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Some people with type 2 diabetes can also achieve remission with the right treatment and support.



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How do type 1 and type 2 diabetes differ?

Type 1 diabetes happens when the immune system attacks the cells that make insulin, so the body stops producing it. It can develop at any age and usually comes on quickly, so it needs urgent treatment with insulin.

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body becomes less responsive to insulin and, over time, may not make enough of it. It usually develops gradually and can often be managed with lifestyle changes, medication or both.





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The signs of type 2 diabetes people overlook

These symptoms can have many causes, and having one does not mean you have diabetes. But if one or more has become part of your normal routine, it is worth speaking to a doctor about a blood test.



Thirst that keeps coming back. You may find yourself drinking more than usual and still feeling thirsty. High blood sugar can cause your body to pass more urine, which can also mean more trips to the loo, including during the night.



Tiredness that does not match your day. Feeling unusually tired or lacking energy can be a sign. When your body cannot use glucose effectively for energy, you may feel tired even after enough sleep.



Blurred vision that comes and goes. High blood sugar can temporarily affect the lens of the eye, causing blurred vision. It can be easy to blame this on screens, tiredness or getting older.



Cuts and grazes that heal slowly. High blood sugar can affect circulation and the body's ability to heal. A small wound that takes longer than expected to heal is worth getting checked.



Infections that keep returning. Repeated thrush, urine infections or some skin infections can be associated with diabetes.



Darkened, velvety patches of skin. These can appear around the neck, armpits or groin and may be a sign of insulin resistance. They can be easy to mistake for normal changes to the skin.

One more symptom deserves particular attention. Losing weight without trying, especially alongside thirst and tiredness, needs prompt medical attention. Diabetes can have more than one cause. When symptoms develop quickly, over days or weeks, it can be a sign of type 1 diabetes, which needs urgent treatment at any age.



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Why there are often no signs at all

Type 2 diabetes can have no obvious symptoms for years. Blood sugar can be high enough to cause harm without making you feel unwell. Many people only find out through a routine blood test.

Your risk also matters, even if you feel well. It is worth speaking to a doctor about testing if any of these apply to you:

Your age. Risk increases as you get older. In the UK, people from South Asian, Black African and African Caribbean backgrounds can develop type 2 diabetes at a younger age.

Your family. Having a parent, brother or sister with type 2 diabetes increases your risk. Genetics is one factor, alongside many others.

Your history. Having diabetes during pregnancy, PMOS or high blood pressure can increase your risk.

Your body. Carrying more weight, particularly around the middle, can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes. But weight is only one risk factor, and people at any weight can develop type 2 diabetes.

None of these mean you will develop diabetes. However, it may be worth talking to a doctor about testing if one or more apply to you.





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If the test finds something

Finding out you have prediabetes or type 2 diabetes can feel difficult to take in. You may feel worried, overwhelmed or even blame yourself. But type 2 diabetes is influenced by many factors, including genetics, age, background and your wider circumstances. It is not simply a question of willpower.

If you have prediabetes, changes to food, physical activity, sleep and other parts of your lifestyle can help lower your blood sugar and reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

If you are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, treatment and support can help you manage your blood sugar and reduce the risk of complications. Some people can also achieve remission.

What is right for you will depend on your health, circumstances and preferences. A doctor can help you understand your options and decide what support you need.



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Health worries and how you feel

Some people avoid testing because life is already full. Others are worried about what the result might show, or blame themselves for what it could mean.

If that sounds familiar, remember that the test does not change what is happening in your body. It changes whether you know about it. And knowing gives you the chance to do something about it.

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At HealthHero, we speak to people who have worried about their health for months before getting help. Carrying that uncertainty on your own can be difficult. If health worries are stopping you from getting checked, you do not have to deal with those feelings alone. Support can help you work through the worry and take the next step.



When to reach out, and how HealthHero can help

It may help to reach out if health worries are taking up a lot of your headspace, if a diagnosis has left you struggling to take it in, or if you are trying to make changes and finding them difficult alongside everything else.

How HealthHero can help

Testing, diagnosis and treatment for type 2 diabetes all need to go through a doctor. But you can also get support with the worry, emotions and changes that can come with a health concern or diagnosis.

Through your EAP, you can speak to a trained counsellor in confidence, at a time that suits you. You can talk through health worries, process a diagnosis and get support as you make changes, without judgement or blame. You do not need a diagnosis before reaching out.



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Contact HealthHero today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.

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