

Diabetes Glossary

Source: [National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion \(CDC\)](#)

blood sugar (or blood glucose): The main sugar that the body makes from the food we eat. Glucose is carried through the bloodstream to provide energy to all of the body's living cells. The cells cannot use glucose without the help of insulin.

beta cells—Cells that make insulin. Beta cells are found in areas of the pancreas called the Islets of Langerhans.

blood glucose (or blood sugar)—The main sugar that the body makes from the food we eat. Glucose is carried through the bloodstream to provide energy to all of the body's living cells. The cells cannot use glucose without the help of insulin.

diabetes—The short name for the disease called diabetes mellitus. Diabetes results when the body cannot use blood glucose as energy because of having too little insulin or being unable to use insulin. See also type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, and gestational diabetes.

diabetes pills—Pills or capsules that are taken by mouth to help lower the blood glucose level. These pills may work for people whose bodies are still making insulin.

diabetic eye disease—A disease of the small blood vessels of the retina of the eye in people with diabetes. In this disease, the vessels swell and leak liquid into the retina, blurring the vision and sometimes leading to blindness.

diabetic ketoacidosis—High blood glucose with the presence of ketones in the urine and bloodstream, often caused by taking too little insulin or during illness.

diabetic kidney disease—Damage to the cells or blood vessels of the kidney.

diabetic nerve damage—Damage to the nerves of a person with diabetes. Nerve damage may affect the feet and hands, as well as major organs.

dialysis—A method for removing waste from the blood when the kidneys can no longer do the job.

food exchanges—A way to help people stay on special food plans by letting them replace items from one food group with items from another group.

gestational diabetes—A type of diabetes that can occur in pregnant women who have not been known to have diabetes before. Although gestational diabetes usually subsides after pregnancy, many women who've had gestational diabetes develop type 2 diabetes later in life.

gingivitis—A swelling and soreness of the gums that, without treatment, can cause serious gum problems and disease.

glucagon—A hormone that raises the blood glucose level. When someone with diabetes has a very low blood glucose level, a glucagon injection can help raise the blood glucose quickly.

glucose—A sugar in our blood and a source of energy for our bodies.

high blood glucose—A condition that occurs in people with diabetes when their blood glucose levels are too high. Symptoms include having to urinate often, being very thirsty, and losing weight.

hormone—A chemical that special cells in the body release to help other cells work. For example, insulin is a hormone made in the pancreas to help the body use glucose as energy.

hyperglycemia—See high blood glucose.

hypoglycemia—See low blood glucose.

impotence—A condition where the penis does not become or stay hard enough for sex. Some men who have had diabetes a long time become impotent if their nerves or blood vessels have become damaged.

inject—To force a liquid into the body with a needle and syringe.

insulin—A hormone that helps the body use blood glucose for energy. The beta cells of the pancreas make insulin. When people with diabetes can't make enough insulin, they may have to inject it from another source.

insulin-dependent diabetes—See type 1 diabetes.

ketones—Chemical substances that the body makes when it doesn't have enough insulin in the blood. When ketones build up in the body for a long time, serious illness or coma can result.

kidneys—Twin organs found in the lower part of the back. The kidneys purify the blood of all waste and harmful material. They also control the level of some helpful chemical substances in the blood.

laser surgery—Surgery that uses a strong ray of special light, called a laser, to treat damaged parts of the body. Laser surgery can help treat some diabetic eye diseases.

low blood glucose—A condition that occurs in people with diabetes when their blood glucose levels are too low. Symptoms include feeling anxious or confused, feeling numb in the arms and hands, and shaking or feeling dizzy.

LDL (or low-density lipoprotein)—A combined protein and fatlike substance. Rich in cholesterol, it tends to stick to the walls in the arteries. Sometimes called "bad cholesterol."

meal plan—A guide to help people get the proper amount of calories, carbohydrates, proteins, and fats in their diet. See also food exchanges.

nephropathy—See diabetic kidney disease.

neuropathy—See diabetic nerve damage.

non-insulin-dependent diabetes—See type 2 diabetes.

pancreas—An organ in the body that makes insulin so that the body can use glucose for energy. The pancreas also makes enzymes that help the body digest food.

periodontitis—A gum disease in which the gums shrink away from the teeth. Without treatment, it can lead to tooth loss.

risk factors—Traits that make it more likely that a person will get an illness. For example, a risk factor for getting type 2 diabetes is having a family history of diabetes.

self-monitoring blood glucose—A way for people with diabetes to find out how much glucose is in their blood. A drop of blood from the fingertip is placed on a special coated strip of paper that “reads” (often through an electronic meter) the amount of glucose in the blood.

type 1 diabetes—A condition in which the pancreas makes so little insulin that the body can’t use blood glucose as energy. Type 1 diabetes most often occurs in people younger than age 30 and must be controlled with daily insulin injections.

type 2 diabetes—A condition in which the body either makes too little insulin or can’t use the insulin it makes to use blood glucose as energy. Type 2 diabetes most often occurs in people older than age 40 and can often be controlled through meal plans and physical activity plans. Some people with type 2 diabetes have to take diabetes pills or insulin.