

WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes is the name given to a group of conditions characterized by an inability to create and/or utilize insulin. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas. When insulin is functioning properly, it regulates the transfer of sugar (glucose) to most of the body's cells, which are dependent upon glucose for energy production. Excess glucose is directed by insulin into storage.

When a diabetic condition exists, insulin becomes either insufficient or ineffective, causing glucose levels in the blood to remain high. The body's cells in essence starve. Over time, diabetes – with its associated high glucose levels – can damage blood vessels, nerves and organs throughout the body, leading to even more health problems, including hypertension and cardiovascular disease. There are three main types of diabetes: type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes.

WHAT CAUSES DIABETES?

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease, which means that the body's immune system malfunctions, actually attacking and destroying insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. Type 1 diabetes accounts for five to 10 percent of diagnosed diabetes in the United States, most often developing in children and young adults.

Type 2 diabetes, the most common form of diabetes, is a condition where the pancreas generally continues to produce insulin, but the body does not use it effectively. While genetics can play a role in the development of some types of diabetes, type 2 is generally associated with older age, obesity, family history of diabetes, previous history of gestational diabetes, physical inactivity and ethnicity.

Almost 80 percent of people with type 2 diabetes are overweight. Gestational diabetes develops only during pregnancy. Like type 2 diabetes, it occurs more frequently in certain ethnic groups (African Americans, Hispanic Americans and American Indians) and among women with family histories of diabetes.

WHAT CAN A BLOOD TEST TELL ME ABOUT DIABETES?

Diabetes is primarily identified through a blood test that measures glucose in the blood. Additional tests, such as the Hemoglobin A1c test, are used during an individual's first diabetes evaluation and again at periodic intervals throughout that individual's treatment.

*For more information regarding the services provided by the Pathology Center,
call (402) 354-4541 or (888) 432-8980.*

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