

Diabetes in the Workplace

In the United States alone, 29.1 million people have diabetes, and it is believed that as many as one out of four people do not know they have the disease. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States. One out of three adults has prediabetes, which, while reversible, can highly increase your risk of diabetes if not managed.



WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes, also known as diabetes mellitus, is a disease in which blood sugar (glucose) levels are too high.

Too much glucose in the blood can lead to serious health problems such as:

Eye problems: Diabetes can damage and weaken the small blood vessels of the retina, the part of the eye that is sensitive to light and sends messages to the brain about what you see. This can lead to blindness. People with diabetes should see an ophthalmologist (an eye doctor) at least once a year.

Heart diseases and stroke: People with diabetes have an increased risk of heart disease or stroke. Your doctor will check your blood pressure and perform blood tests to check your cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Nerve damage: Diabetes can cause nerve damage over time and lead to symptoms such as numbness, burning, or pain. Check your feet daily. If you see swelling, redness, and feel warmth in your feet, see your doctor immediately.

Kidney damage: The small blood vessels in the kidneys help filter the waste from the blood. This filtering system can be damaged by diabetes leading to kidney disease or failure. A urine test should be performed annually to look for kidney disease.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DIABETES?

- Increased thirst
- Increased hunger
- Frequent urination
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Dry, itchy skin
- Blurred vision
- Slow healing sores, wounds, or bruises
- Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet
- Frequent or recurring skin, gum, bladder, or vaginal yeast infections

The workplace shouldn't be a barrier to diabetes management.

Job tasks and scheduling might make it seem challenging, but with the right planning, a worker can take the necessary precautions to stay safe and healthy. People with diabetes with jobs that involve physical labor or the operation of machinery should be aware of early warning signs of low blood sugar which can cause disorientation and dizziness and create a safety concern. Complications involving the nerves, eyes, and heart arising from diabetes can also affect safety. It is important to allot time to regularly test blood glucose, administer insulin, and access food and drink to keep diabetes in check.



WHAT CAUSES DIABETES?

When the stomach digests food, carbohydrates in food break down into a sugar called "glucose". Insulin, a hormone released by the pancreas, controls glucose in the body. Insulin reduces glucose levels in the blood by enabling glucose to enter the body's cells.

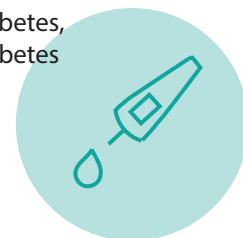
When the cells stop getting enough insulin or responding to insulin, glucose accumulates in the blood. This is **high blood sugar**.

HOW IS DIABETES DIAGNOSED?

There are multiple tests to diagnose diabetes. Your doctor may require one or more of these blood tests to determine your blood glucose levels and if you have diabetes or prediabetes.

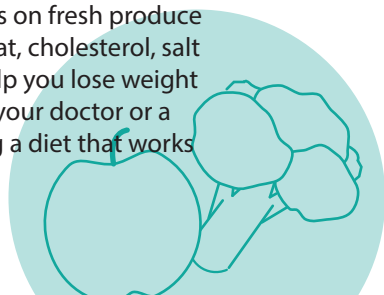
	Normal	Prediabetes	Diabetes
A1C	<5.7%	5.7-6.5%	>6.5%
FPG	<100 mg/dL	100-126 mg/dL	>126 mg/dL
OGTT	<140 mg/dL	140-200 mg/dL	>200 mg/dL

Prediabetes means your blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. If you have prediabetes, you have an increased risk of developing diabetes over the next five years. Prediabetes can be reversed by lifestyle modifications.



HOW IS DIABETES CONTROLLED?

Eat a healthy diet that focuses on fresh produce and whole grains and limits fat, cholesterol, salt and added sugar. This can help you lose weight in a healthy way. Speak with your doctor or a nutritionist about developing a diet that works for you.



Exercise regularly. Exercise improves your body's use of insulin and also lowers blood sugar levels. Check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

Medications. If your diabetes cannot be controlled with diet, exercise, and weight management, then your doctor may recommend medications.

If you have a sedentary job, take short breaks to de-stress and move around. Look for healthy choices when you buy food, or pack a healthy lunch and snacks. Programs available through the workplace can help employees with weight loss, smoking cessation, and other health initiatives that can positively impact diabetes risk factors.

The information is for educational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you have regarding your medical care.



Mount Sinai Selikoff Centers for Occupational Health

The Selikoff Centers for Occupational Health are dedicated to preventing, diagnosing, and treating work-related injuries and illnesses. Our multilingual and highly skilled team of board-certified occupational medicine physicians, industrial hygienists, ergonomists, workers' compensation coordinators, and social workers provide patient-centered services for workers and retirees in New York City and the Mid-Hudson Valley.

