

Too Much Sugar in the Blood: Warning Signs of Diabetes in Children

Many people think diabetes is an adult-only disease, but it's not. If you're a parent, you should know what diabetes is and what its symptoms are.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition where the pancreas doesn't work properly to produce insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy for cells in our bodies. Without insulin, the blood sugar rises and the body turns to another source of energy (fat). Although this works for a short time, breaking down fat can lead to a serious condition called Diabetic Ketoacidosis.

Types of diabetes

Type 1 diabetes is the form that typically affects children. Type 1 diabetes results when the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin in the pancreas. To survive, people with type 1 diabetes must take insulin daily either through injections or a pump. Type 1 diabetes accounts for about 5 to 10 percent of all diagnosed diabetes in the United States.

Type 2 diabetes usually appears after adolescence. However, it's increasingly being diagnosed in pre-adolescent children -- especially African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, American Indians, and Asians/Pacific Islanders. People with type 2 diabetes make insulin but their cells are resistant to the insulin, forcing the pancreas to work hard to overcome this resistance. The pancreas gradually loses its ability to produce insulin. Treatment of people with type 2 diabetes varies as some need to take insulin only, medication only, or insulin and medication. About 90 to 95 percent of people with diabetes have type 2.

Prevalence

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Each year, more than 13,000 young people are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.
- Type 2 diabetes in children and adolescents already appears to be a sizable and growing problem among U.S. children and adolescents.

Warning signs

People who have diabetes might have some or none of the following symptoms:

- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst
- Unexplained weight loss
- Extreme hunger
- Sudden vision changes
- Fatigue

Treatment

If you notice some of the above symptoms, and are concerned that your child has diabetes, then you can get him treatment early to prevent damage to his body.

Your child's primary care provider can test your child's blood glucose sugar level and urine. If your child is diagnosed with diabetes, healthcare providers who specialize in diabetes can then help you successfully manage your child's disease.

To learn more about diabetes and how it's diagnosed and treated, please visit the Diabetes Center for Children website at www.chop.edu/diabetes.

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