

# Diabetes

Information to help you improve your health from  
**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama**

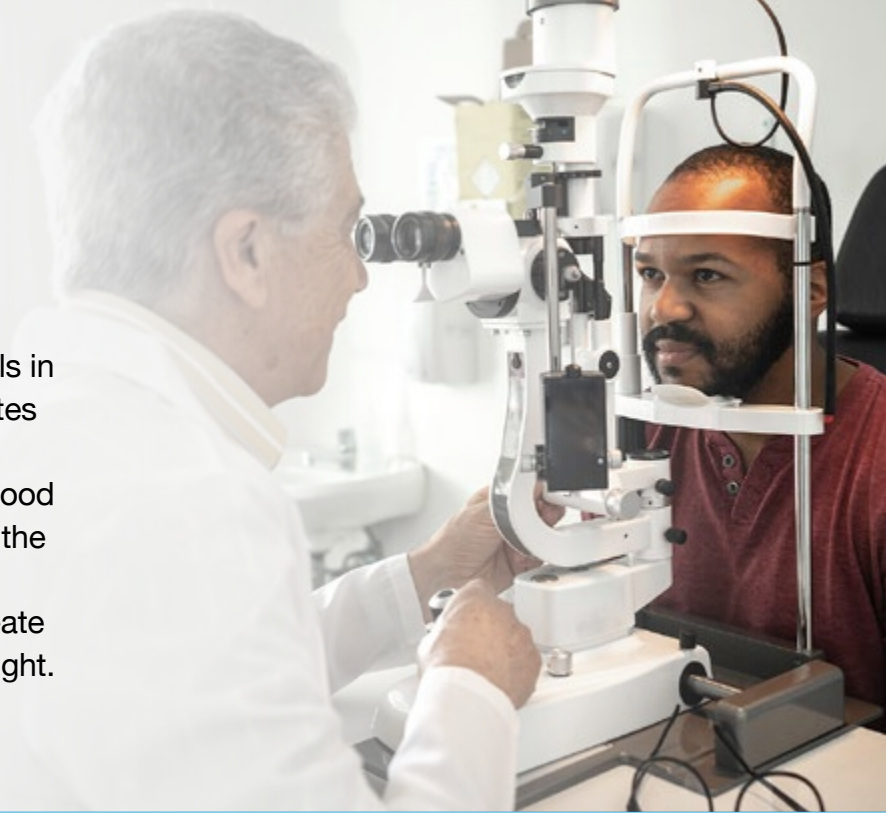


When your body has a hard time controlling blood sugar levels, it creates the condition known as diabetes. This can be because your body does not produce enough of (or has become resistant to) a hormone called insulin, which controls your blood sugar levels. **When blood sugar levels get too high, this can cause health problems.** Common symptoms of diabetes may include frequent urination, strong thirst, increased fatigue or unexpected weight loss.



# Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is damage to blood vessels in the retina (tissue in the back of the eye). Diabetes causes high levels of sugar in the blood. Over time, excess blood sugar can damage small blood vessels in the body, including blood vessels in the retina. As a result, some vessels may close off. They also bleed or leak fluid into the eye or create scarring, which can cause problems with eyesight.



## Risk Factors

Things that raise the risk of diabetic retinopathy are:

- Poorly-controlled diabetes
- Having diabetes for 20 years or longer
- High blood pressure
- Recent cataract surgery
- Kidney disease
- Pregnancy and puberty
- High cholesterol levels



## Symptoms

Early diabetic retinopathy may not cause any symptoms. Over time, symptoms may be:

- Blurred or double vision
- Lower vision or loss of vision – in one or both eyes
- Spots or what looks like floating objects – in one or both eyes
- Eye pressure or pain
- Problems seeing in dim light
- Seeing flashing lights or rings around lights
- Sudden blindness (rare)

## Diagnosis

An eye doctor will do an eye exam and vision test. Diagnosis is based on an exam of the retina.

## Treatment

Early stages of the disease may not need treatment. However, it is important to manage blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure. This can slow or stop more damage. If eye treatment is needed, options are:

- Medicines injected into the eye to slow or stop damage
- Surgery to slow the condition or keep it from getting worse



## Prevention

To help lower the risk of getting diabetic retinopathy:

- Manage blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Have regular eye exams
- Follow a healthy diet and lifestyle

# Keep Your Memory Sharp

**Many things can affect memory:**

AGING • STRESS • ILLNESS • CERTAIN MEDICINES

## Live a Healthy Life

Many actions that keep your body strong will do the same for your mind. For example:

- Regular physical activity:  
Regular physical activity increases blood flow to the brain. It also lowers the risk of certain diseases that can affect memory. Even moderate physical activity may help.
- Minimize Medicines  
Talk to your doctor about the medicines that you take. There may be some that can affect your memory. See if they can be changed, limited or stopped. Healthy habits may lower the need for certain drugs.

## Talk to Your Doctor About Herbs and Supplement

Poor nutrition can impair your mental function. It is important to eat a well-balanced diet.

This includes plenty of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and lean proteins.

If you have questions, speak to a dietitian. Your doctor can give a referral if you need one.

Talk to your doctor before taking any herbs or supplements. They may interact with other medicines you are taking.



## Challenge Your Brain

Your brain is like your body. It needs exercise to stay in shape. Here are some ways to get more mental exercise:

- Do crossword puzzles and brain teasers
- Have hobbies, such as gardening
- Socialize – visit old friends
- Read the daily news, a good book or a magazine
- Travel – experience different food, history and cultures
- Go to museums, the theater or thought-provoking movies

## Use Memory Aids

There is no need to remember every detail on your own. Use:

- Calendars and day planners
- Electronic organizers that send alerts to remind you of appointments
- To-Do lists and sticky notes in places where you will see them
- Establish routines

## Manage Stress

It can be tough to remember things when your mind is cluttered. Make time for relaxation. Choose activities that calm you down. Try:

- Listening to soothing music
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Deep breathing

# Lifestyle Changes to Manage Diabetes

Diet, healthy weight and regular activity are important parts of a treatment plan. Healthy habits can help decrease the risk of complications.

## Weight Loss

Weight loss can make the body more responsive to insulin. This will lead to better blood glucose control.

Losing just 5% to 10% of body weight can make a difference in your blood glucose control for people who are overweight.

## Diet

A balanced diet will help to manage blood glucose, reduce weight and lower risk of complications.



Blood glucose rises and falls with eating patterns. Eating similar meals and at similar times each day will help keep blood glucose stable.

Most diabetes plans are based on three meals per day and two to three snacks. Meals should have about the same amount of carbohydrate, protein and fat as the same meal the day before.

American Diabetes Association (ADA) tips for a healthy plate include:

- Choose a larger amount of non-starchy vegetables. There are many kinds to choose from like spinach, carrots, broccoli, cucumbers, mushrooms and peppers
- Add a small serving of starchy foods. Some examples include: whole grain bread, rice, cooked beans, peas, corn and potatoes
- Add a small serving of meat or meat substitute (such as chicken, fish, shrimp or tofu)
- Drink a glass of fat-free milk with your meal



## Exercise

The ADA recommends exercising for at least 150 minutes a week. Examples include brisk walking, riding a bicycle, playing tennis or doing water aerobics.

Strength training should be done at least twice a week. Examples of strength training include using free weights, weight machines or resistance bands.

Exercise usually causes a drop in blood glucose. Medication dose and schedule may need to be changed as regular exercise increases.

## When to Contact Your Doctor

Contact your doctor if you:

- Are having difficulty losing weight
- Feel that your eating plan is too difficult to follow
- Want to start an exercise program
- Have any symptoms of hypoglycemia after exercising
- Shakiness
- Lightheadedness
- Extreme sweating
- Headache
- Pale skin color





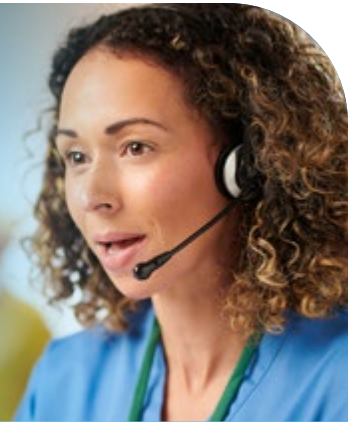
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Call **1-888-841-5741** for more information.

[AlabamaBlue.com/TalkToANurse](http://AlabamaBlue.com/TalkToANurse)



## COVID-19 Update

The current vaccines provide a high level of protection against severe disease.

**Getting vaccinated will help keep you and your family healthy and safe.**

### STAY SAFE.

This information is provided for general informational purposes. Information contained in this communication is not intended to replace professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider regarding your healthcare needs. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking medical advice because of something you have read in this informational piece. Always check your benefits for coverage information and limitations.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccine and its availability in your area, contact your physician's office or local pharmacy. Additional COVID-19 topics and how the pandemic could affect you and your family can be found at [www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)



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