

## *Backgrounder*

### **About Diabetes**

#### **Diabetes is complex**

Diabetes is a complex disease with multifaceted causes and no known cure. There are three main types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes most commonly begins in childhood and occurs when the body is unable to produce insulin, a hormone that controls the level of glucose (sugar) in the blood. This happens when a person's immune system attacks the cells in the pancreas that make insulin. Approximately 10 per cent of people with diabetes have type 1 diabetes.

The most common type of diabetes is type 2, and is found in approximately 90 per cent of Canadians living with diabetes and occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body does not effectively use the insulin it produces. Type 2 diabetes usually develops in adulthood, although more children and adolescents are being diagnosed, especially those in high-risk populations, such as Aboriginal Peoples, African, Asian, Hispanic and South Asian descent.

A third type of diabetes is gestational diabetes—a temporary condition that develops during pregnancy. Blood glucose levels usually return to normal following delivery, however both mother and child are at higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

Prediabetes occurs when an individual's blood glucose levels are elevated, but not yet at a level high enough to be diagnosed as type 2 diabetes. Approximately 50 per cent of those with prediabetes will go on to develop type 2 diabetes.

#### **Diabetes is growing**

Diabetes is a serious disease that has reached epidemic proportions in Canada. Currently, more than nine million Canadians, or one in four, are living with diabetes or prediabetes—a number expected to rise to one in three by 2020.

If left untreated or improperly managed, diabetes may result in serious complications, such as heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney disease and limb amputations. However, with proper diabetes management, diabetes complications can be prevented or delayed. It's important that Canadians educate themselves about the disease to recognize if they are at risk.

#### **Diabetes isn't invisible**

The signs and symptoms of diabetes include: unusual thirst, frequent urination, weight gain or loss, extreme tiredness or lack of energy, blurred vision, frequent or recurring infections, cuts and bruises that are slow to heal, and tingling or numbness in hands or feet.

You are at risk of type 2 diabetes if you are:

- Aged 40 or older;
- A member of a high-risk group;
- Overweight, especially if you carry most of your weight around your middle;

Or have:

- A parent or sibling with diabetes;
- Health complications that are associated with diabetes;
- Given birth to a baby that weighed more than 4 kg (9 lbs);
- Had gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy);
- Impaired glucose tolerance or impaired fasting glucose;
- High blood pressure;
- High cholesterol or other fats in the blood; or,
- Have been diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome, acanthosis nigricans (darkened patches of skin), or schizophrenia.

### **Diabetes is a financial burden**

Many people living with diabetes cannot afford to properly manage their disease—57 per cent of Canadians living with diabetes say they are unable to comply with their prescribed medical therapy. This is because they simply cannot afford costly medications, devices and supplies, thus potentially compromising their health. Diabetes also costs our health care system and economy \$13.1 billion this year, and is projected to cost \$16 billion annually by 2020. Unless we take action, diabetes threatens not only more Canadians, but also our health care system and prosperity.

For additional information on diabetes and the Canadian Diabetes Association, visit [diabetes.ca](http://diabetes.ca) or call 1-800-BANTING (226-8464).