

# What Does It Really Mean to Have Prediabetes?

Given that diabetes is costly, hard to treat, and approaching epidemic levels, it's not surprising that interest in prediabetes is growing. The majority of people with prediabetes don't even know they have it.

Prediabetes is a condition that precedes the onset of type 2 diabetes. It is characterized by blood glucose levels that are elevated, though not high enough to be classified as diabetes.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends screening for all adults 45 years old and older. Also, if you are younger than 45 and are overweight or obese and have risk factors for diabetes, you should be screened. Risk factors include:

- Family history of diabetes
- Having hypertension, high cholesterol, or high triglycerides
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Belonging to certain ethnic groups (Hispanic American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, or African American)
- History of gestational diabetes or giving birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds
- History of cardiovascular disease
- Having a condition associated with insulin resistance, such as polycystic ovary syndrome or metabolic syndrome

“Having prediabetes means that you are at high risk for developing diabetes,” explains Roshney Jacob, MD, a board-certified endocrinologist and head of the Diabetes and Endocrine Center at Nashoba Valley Medical Center. “The good news is that the progression to diabetes can be prevented with lifestyle changes, with better diet and more exercise.”

If your doctor suspects a diagnosis of prediabetes, they can order the following tests:

- Fasting plasma glucose test
- Oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT)
- Hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c)



## Managing Prediabetes

If you are diagnosed with prediabetes, it is important to take action to manage your condition. If you are overweight, your doctor may recommend that you lose weight. In general, changing your diet and being physically active and exercising at least 30 minutes a day will help you stay on track. Because many of the lifestyle-related risk factors associated with diabetes are also risk factors for other health issues, making lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of diabetes may have a positive effect on your overall health.

Some people can take medication to manage their blood glucose levels, though lifestyle modification is favored over pharmaceuticals as the first approach to manage prediabetes.

## How Serious is Prediabetes?

If you have prediabetes, then you are at risk for type 2 diabetes and other serious conditions, like heart attack and stroke. Other long-term health problems can result if you do not have good control over your blood sugar levels. Complications related to type 2 diabetes include but are not limited to:

- Blindness
- Impotence
- Kidney disease
- Nerve damage
- Limb amputation
- Cognitive decline

## Preventing Prediabetes

The same strategies that are used to lower your risk of type 2 diabetes can be applied to prediabetes, as well. Losing excess weight, exercising for at least 150 minutes per week, reducing your intake of calories and fat, and trying to eat more fiber and whole grains are strategies that can help you reduce your risk.

If you do have prediabetes, you can take steps that may slow or avoid the progression to type 2 diabetes. It will take a lot of effort on your part, but the potential benefits – being healthy and living longer – are worth it in the long run.

**To learn more about Nashoba Valley Medical Center's Diabetes and Endocrine Center or to schedule an appointment, call 978-784-9534 or visit [www.nashobamed.org/Diabetes-and-Endocrine-Center](http://www.nashobamed.org/Diabetes-and-Endocrine-Center).**