

WELLNESS



5 MYTHS ABOUT

TYPE 2 DIABETES

The condition is incredibly common—and so is confusion about who gets it and how to manage it.

BY TULA KARRAS

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MYTH:

You won't develop type 2 diabetes if it's not in your family tree.

MYTHBUSTER

Anyone can develop diabetes. Having a family history of the disease raises your risk, as does lack of physical activity, a poor diet, and carrying a lot of weight. But even people who don't have family members with diabetes aren't completely safe. "There are genes that predispose us to diabetes, but this won't necessarily show up in your family history," says John Merendino, M.D., an endocrinologist and an assistant clinical professor of medicine at George Washington

University School of Medicine. If your grandfather had a genetic tendency, for example, but was an avid marathoner,

he might not have developed it. Your best move: Starting at age 35, get checked, unless your M.D. advises you to start screening earlier.

2

MYTH:

Symptoms of diabetes are pretty obvious.

MYTHBUSTER

Not always. While you may experience some clear and classic symptoms—frequent urination, increased thirst, blurred vision, fatigue—there are lesser-known signs you might not notice or might attribute to other conditions. These include neuropathy (tingling or numbness in your limbs, hands, and feet); itchy skin; vaginal yeast infections; fungal skin infections; gingivitis; and weight loss, says Dr. Merendino. But even people with no symptoms should talk to their doctors about diabetes. "About 3.4% of adults, or 8.7 million, have undiagnosed diabetes and aren't getting the treatment they need," says Priya Jaisinghani, M.D., an endocrinologist and obesity medicine doctor at NYU Langone Health. Diabetes can be diagnosed via blood work.

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3

MYTH:

**People with
prediabetes
don't need
medication.**

MYTHBUSTER

Some of the one in three American adults with prediabetes (elevated blood sugar that appears to be progressing toward diabetes) may benefit from meds right away. This depends on several things, including their A1c level (a lab marker for diabetes), their family history, and complicating factors such as being very heavy and having liver disease. "About one-third of those with prediabetes will go on to develop diabetes over five to 10 years, and that number increases with

time," says Dr. Merendino. Early care may include standard diabetes medication like metformin and SGLT2 inhibitors, or one of the newer meds such as Ozempic and Mounjaro; these help lower blood sugar and promote weight loss, which can reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. "These drugs have fundamentally transformed the landscape for diabetes management," says Dr. Jaisinghani.

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4

MYTH:

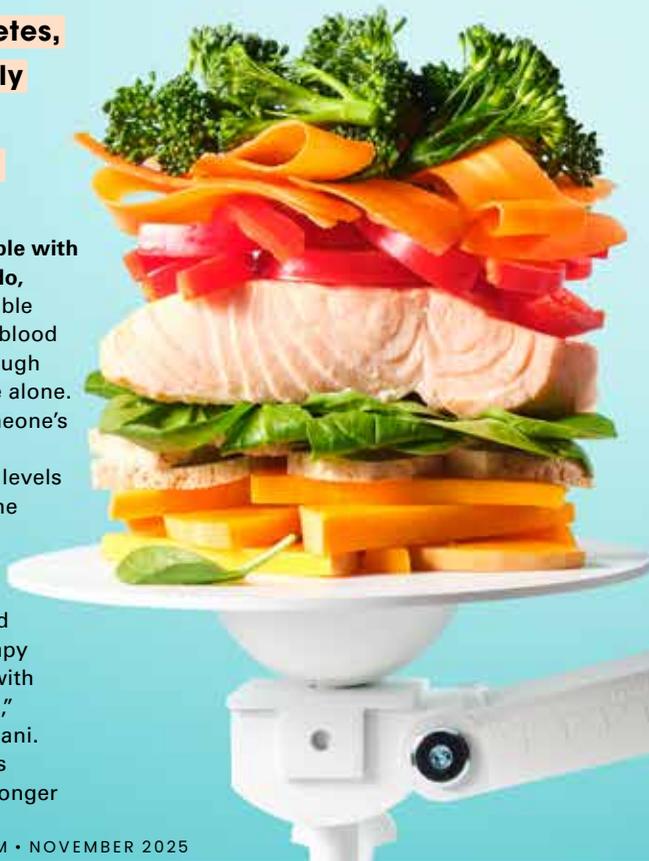
If you have type 2 diabetes, you definitely need meds to control it.

MYTHBUSTER

While many people with type 2 diabetes do, some might be able to manage their blood sugar levels through diet and exercise alone. "The higher someone's blood sugar and hemoglobin A1c levels are, the higher the risk of diabetes complications and the more likely they'll need medication therapy in combination with lifestyle changes," says Dr. Jaisinghani. Lifestyle changes alone may take longer

to make a difference than medication. And if a person has already tried eating better and exercising more, for example, and their blood sugar is still too high, it's important to

get the disease under control right away with medication. "Delaying treatment can lead to serious complications such as heart disease and nerve damage," she says.



MICHAEL HEDGE.

5

MYTH:

People with type 2 diabetes are responsible for their diagnosis—it happened because they didn't eat right or exercise.

MYTHBUSTER

No one should be blamed for developing diabetes. Not only is it unhelpful to stigmatize people, but no one can control their genetics—having even one biological parent with diabetes raises your risk by 40%. As for the factors that are arguably within a person's control, not everyone has access to adequate health care, healthy food, and leisure time to be physically active.

Eating healthily and exercising do help, but the problem of lack of access to a healthy lifestyle is a systemic one, so blaming individuals is off base, not to mention unkind.

If you want to make a difference, find out where your legislator stands on expanding health care access and vote accordingly.

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