

## Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone needed to convert sugar, starches, and other food into the energy necessary for daily life. When the pancreas doesn't produce adequate amounts of insulin, or when the muscle, fat and liver cells don't respond to insulin properly, glucose builds up in the blood (hyperglycemia). This can be toxic to your cells.

There are 3 main types of diabetes:

- Type 1 diabetes – develops most often in children and young adults.
- Type 2 diabetes – can develop at any age and **can largely be preventable**. Factors such as obesity and lack of exercise can play important roles.
- Gestational diabetes – develops in women during pregnancy.

Diabetes can result in such conditions as:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Blindness
- Kidney disease
- Nervous system disease ("neuropathy")
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Amputations
- Skin problems, including ulcers and infections
- Reduced muscle strength and physical function



According to the Centers for Disease Control, almost

**26** million

children and adults are living with diabetes

## HOW CAN A PHYSICAL THERAPIST HELP?

- **Prescribe, and supervise, an individualized aerobic exercise plan.** Exercise is an important part of managing diabetes, and can lower your need for medications, and risk of heart disease and stroke. Physical therapists can design exercise programs to help you achieve health safely.
- **Help you manage exercise precautions.** A physical therapist can safely evaluate and accommodate for any considerations such as blood sugar levels, eye site problems, foot ulcers or numbness, and/or use of an assistive walking device.
- **Treat complications.** When diabetes isn't managed well, it can lead to problems, often in the legs, such as skin breakdowns, cramping, numbness, pain, etc... A physical therapist can check sensation in your feet and develop a plan to protect them, decrease cramping, and improve walking ability.