

**Diabetes Awareness Month**  
**Cause of the Disease Still Unknown, But Much Known About**  
**Managing It - Learn the Facts**

Diabetes is a condition in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone that converts sugar, starches and other food into energy needed for daily life. The cause of diabetes continues to be a mystery, although both genetics and environmental factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play roles. Approximately 23.6 million people in the United States have diabetes - about eight percent of the population.

In the spirit of Diabetes Awareness Month (November), here are some facts provided by the American Diabetes Association that address common diabetes myths.

**Myth 1: People with diabetes cannot eat sweets or chocolate.**

**Fact:** People who have diabetes can have sweets if they are eaten in moderation and are part of a healthy meal plan and exercise. Chocolate, for example, is no more "off limits" to people with diabetes than it is to people without diabetes.

**Myth 2: Eating too much sugar causes diabetes.**

**Fact:** Diabetes is caused by a combination of genetic and lifestyle factors; however, being overweight does increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. If you have a history of diabetes in your family, eating a healthy meal plan and regular exercise are recommended for managing your weight.

**Myth 3: People with diabetes should eat special diabetic foods.**

**Fact:** A healthy meal plan for people with diabetes is the same as that for everyone: low in fat (especially saturated and trans fat), moderate in salt and sugar with meals based on whole grain foods, vegetables and fruit. Diabetic and "dietetic" versions of foods that typically contain sugar offer no special benefit, because they still raise blood glucose levels, are usually more expensive and can also have a laxative effect if they contain sugar alcohols.

**Myth 4: If you have diabetes, you shouldn't eat starchy foods, such as bread, potatoes and pasta.**

**Fact:** In moderation, starchy foods such as whole grain breads, cereals, pastas, rice and starchy vegetables like potatoes, yams, peas and corn can

be part of a healthy meal plan for people who have diabetes. For most people with diabetes, having 3-4 servings of foods that have carbohydrates is about right. Whole grain starchy foods are also a good source of fiber, which helps keep the gut healthy.

**Myth 5: People with diabetes are more likely to get colds and other illnesses.**

**Fact:** People are no more likely to get a cold or other illness if they have diabetes. However, people with diabetes are advised to get flu shots. This is because infections interfere with blood glucose management, putting the person at risk of high blood glucose levels. Also, people with type 1 diabetes do have an increased risk of ketoacidosis (dangerously high levels of ketones). Ketones are acids that build up in the blood. They appear in the urine when your body doesn't have enough insulin. Ketones can poison the body and are a warning sign that your diabetes is out of control or that you are getting sick.

Source: American Diabetes Association