

# LONG-TERM PROBLEMS FOR PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

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## Long-Term Problems For People With Diabetes

People with diabetes are at risk for long-term problems affecting the eyes, kidneys, heart, brain, feet, and nerves. The best way to prevent or delay these problems is to control your blood sugar and take good care of yourself.

### Eyes

It is recommended that people with diabetes see an eye doctor every year for a dilated eye exam. Eye problems that can occur with diabetes include:

- **Cataracts:** (a clouding of the lens of the eyes)
- **Glaucoma:** (increased pressure in the eye)
- **Retinopathy:** (eye changes with the retina in the back of the eye)

### Symptoms of eye problems include:

- Blurred vision
- Spots or lines in your vision
- Watery eyes
- Eye discomfort
- Loss of vision

If you have any changes in your vision, call your healthcare provider.

### Kidneys

Have your urine checked for protein at least once a year. Protein in the urine is a sign of kidney disease. High blood pressure might also lead to kidney disease. Your blood pressure should be checked when you see your healthcare provider.

**Symptoms of a kidney problem include:**

- Swelling of the hands, feet, and face
- Weight gain from edema
- Itching and/or drowsiness (this can occur with end-stage kidney disease)

Prompt treatment may slow the changes with kidney disease.

**Heart and brain**

All people with diabetes have an increased chance for heart disease and strokes. Heart disease is the major cause of death in people with diabetes. It is important to control other risks such as high blood pressure and high fats (cholesterol), as well as blood sugar.

**Symptoms of a heart attack include:**

- Shortness of breath
- Feeling faint
- Feeling dizzy
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Chest pain or pressure
- Pain in the shoulders, jaw, and left arm

**Warning signs of a stroke include:**

- Sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm, or leg, usually on one side of the body
- Sudden nausea
- Fever
- Vomiting.
- Difficulty speaking or understanding words or simple sentences
- Sudden blurred vision or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dizziness
- Loss of balance or loss of coordination

- Brief loss of consciousness
- Sudden inability to move part of the body (paralysis)
- Sudden intense headache

Call your doctor or go to an emergency room if any of these signs or symptoms occur.

## Feet

High blood sugars can lead to poor flow and nerve damage. This can lead to slow healing of sores. You can experience severe pain, but you can also lose feeling in your feet. In serious cases, this may lead to amputation of your toes, foot, or leg.

## Nerves

High blood sugars can affect all of the nerve endings in your body. Nerve damage can cause many problems.

### Symptoms of nerve damage include:

- Burning pain
- Numbness
- Tingling or loss of feeling in the feet or lower legs
- Constipation and diarrhea
- Problems with sexual function in both men and women

## Neuropathy

Neuropathy is a disorder of the nervous system that can affect people with diabetes. There are different forms of neuropathy, including:

- Peripheral neuropathy - damage to the peripheral nervous system
- Autonomic Type I - damage to the nerves of internal organs
- Gastroparesis - movement of food through the stomach slows or stops
- Postural hypotension - drop in blood pressure due to change in body position
- Uncontrolled diarrhea

If you experience any of the above, talk with your healthcare provider.

This information is provided by the Cleveland Clinic and is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or healthcare provider. Please consult your healthcare provider for advice about a specific medical condition.

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