

HEALTH HUB
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SMALL HABITS FOR BIG IMPACTS

PLANTING SEEDS TO REVERSE PREDIABETES



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Prediabetes

Just like a small seed can grow into a mighty tree, small daily habits can create lasting change. More than 2 in 5 American adults have prediabetes, a condition that comes before diabetes. It is when blood glucose (blood sugar) levels are higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be classified as type 2 diabetes. People with prediabetes are unable to process sugar properly anymore. Prediabetes is a reversible window of opportunity to prevent type 2 diabetes and other related conditions such as heart disease or stroke.

What Causes Prediabetes?

While the exact cause of prediabetes is unknown, family history and genetics can contribute to the condition. Prediabetes occurs when the body stops responding well to insulin, causing sugar to build up in the blood, also called insulin resistance. Instead of sugar being used to fuel the body, it's stuck and building up in the bloodstream.



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Reducing your Prediabetes Risk

Knowing your risk factors is a powerful first step toward protecting your health. While these factors don't guarantee you will develop the condition, they are important signs to watch out for. Review this list to see what might apply to you and how you can start reducing your risk:



- **Weight:** Having too much body fat, especially around your belly, makes it harder for your body to use its natural energy hormones properly.
- **Waist size:** Your risk goes up if your waist measures more than 40 inches for men or 35 inches for women.
- **Diet:** Eating a lot of red meat, processed meats (like bacon or hot dogs), and drinking sugary sodas or juices increases your risk.
- **Inactivity:** Being sedentary or having lower physical activity increases your risk.
- **Age:** Being over age 35.
- **Family history:** Having a parent or sibling diagnosed with type 2 diabetes increases your risk.
- **Race or ethnicity:** Although unclear why, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and Asian American individuals face a higher risk.
- **Gestational diabetes:** A history of diabetes while pregnant elevates future risks for both mother and child.
- **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS):** This hormonal disorder in women, often linked to obesity and irregular cycles, raises the risk.
- **Sleep:** Conditions like obstructive sleep apnea disrupt sleep quality and increase the risk of insulin resistance.
- **Tobacco use:** Tobacco use worsens insulin resistance and accelerates the transition from prediabetes to type 2 diabetes.

A top-down view of various healthy food items and diabetes management tools arranged on a white marble surface. The food items include a white bowl of cooked shrimp garnished with lemon slices, a small glass bowl of hummus, two cucumbers, a head of broccoli, two red bell peppers, a small bowl of green peas, a pile of almonds, a bundle of wooden skewers, and a small bowl of cherry tomatoes. Next to the food are a black glucose meter with a white test strip inserted, a white insulin pen, and a small white container of insulin.

Lifestyle Changes to Prevent Prediabetes

Just as a seed needs the right soil, water, and sunlight to flourish, your body requires proper nourishment and movement to thrive and keep blood sugar balanced. If you have prediabetes, you can reduce your risk of getting type 2 diabetes by over half, even if diabetes runs in your family, through modifying lifestyle behaviors. Fortunately, adopting healthy lifestyle habits can benefit many health conditions, helping you manage your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar simultaneously.

Make small, gradual adjustments, such as improved nutrition and weight loss. Supporting your physical well-being can significantly boost your metabolic health and reduce your risk of diabetes by 50%. Focus on sustainable shifts rather than restrictive behaviors. Choose lifestyle changes that can be maintained as long-term habits to retain the benefits of the change. Prediabetes can return if you revert to old lifestyle habits.

Nourish Your Body

To nourish your body, enjoy non-starchy vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins. Try adding in more fibrous foods and cutting back on sugary beverages and ultra-processed foods. Managing prediabetes through your diet doesn't have to be restrictive. Incorporating nutrient-dense food groups in balanced portions can help keep your blood sugar steady. Focus on adding in the following foods to your diet:

- **Non-starchy veggies:** Broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, Brussels sprouts, carrots, beets, cucumbers, eggplant, various mushrooms, peppers, zucchini, summer squash, tomatoes, and leafy greens.
- **Lean protein sources:** Eggs, fish, shellfish, skinless poultry, lean cuts of beef (such as flank or sirloin), beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, and lower-fat cheeses.

- **Fresh fruits:** Apples, bananas, oranges, peaches, pears, apricots, berries, and melons.
- **Complex carbohydrates and starchy veggies:** Oats, brown rice, quinoa, whole-grain breads and pastas, sweet potatoes, regular potatoes with the skin left on, winter squash, corn, and peas.
- **Low-fat dairy:** Skim or low-fat milk, cottage cheese, and plain Greek yogurt.
- **Heart-healthy fats:** Avocados, olives, olive oil, and a variety of nuts and seeds.
- **Hydration:** Water and other zero-sugar beverages.



Tobacco Cessation

Tobacco cessation, including vaping, is another important lifestyle change to incorporate to reduce risk of prediabetes. Nicotine changes chemical processes in cells so they don't respond to insulin, compounding diabetes risk. Aim to quit using tobacco products with a tobacco cessation program such as [Way to Quit](#) or the [SLCo Employee Wellness tobacco cessation program](#).



Physical Activity

Physical activity is essential for preventing and managing prediabetes. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. Choose activities you love, and if you're short on time, try "exercise snacks" or short movement breaks you can do anywhere for a short amount of time. These add up and make big impacts especially for helping the body clear blood sugar.

Short bouts of movement, especially when done shortly after meals, are effective at helping muscles pull sugar out of the bloodstream. Engaging muscles triggers insulin sensitivity and glucose uptake making these micro-breaks a powerful tool for blood sugar management. Think of these short bursts of movement as daily sunlight and water habits. Small inputs over time help deep roots take hold. Try some of these exercise-snack ideas below.

- Jumping jacks or a quick 5-minute walk.
- A few fast squats, lunges, or push-ups.
- Dancing to your favorite song.
- Simple yoga poses.

Blood Pressure

Look to manage your blood pressure. Monitoring your blood pressure from home is a great way to see if your lifestyle adjustments are paying off. You can purchase an over-the-counter blood pressure monitor at most pharmacies and retail stores or utilize the [Employee Wellness blood pressure lending library](#).

Consult with your doctor before measuring at home. Talk to your medical provider to get guidance, learn proper technique, and confirm your setup to safely and accurately measure your blood pressure. Keep a log to track your daily readings consistently to identify trends and patterns over time. Keep in mind that home tracking doesn't replace clinical visits. Remember to speak with your healthcare team to establish how frequently you should schedule formal checkups to manage your blood pressure safely.



Cholesterol

Your body naturally produces cholesterol, which is also present in certain animal-derived foods. During a cholesterol screening, your doctor evaluates a panel of blood fats known as a lipid profile. This panel measures triglycerides alongside two primary types of cholesterol: HDL ("good") cholesterol and LDL ("bad") cholesterol. While cholesterol is vital for proper body function, excessive levels of "bad" LDL cholesterol can lead to narrowed or blocked blood vessels.

Managing these cholesterol levels is especially crucial for individuals with diabetes, as they face a higher statistical likelihood of developing unhealthy cholesterol profiles. Diabetes tends to lower levels of good cholesterol and increase levels of bad cholesterol resulting in other health conditions along with diabetes such as heart disease.

Prediabetes Support

While lifestyle modifications are the cornerstone of preventing prediabetes and type 2 diabetes, you don't have to navigate it alone. Sometimes, structured medical support and clinical interventions are necessary to help bridge the gap and ensure healthy habits take root to grow into a lifetime of wellness.

In certain cases, your doctor may recommend medication. The most common prescription is metformin, which helps lower glucose production in the liver and improves your body's sensitivity to insulin.

Recognized by the CDC, the National Diabetes Prevention Program (NDPP) is a structured, year-long lifestyle change program designed specifically for people with prediabetes. It connects you with a trained coach and a group of peers to help you learn healthy eating habits, increase physical activity, and manage stress.

Salt Lake County Employee Wellness offers this class to you for free. Sign up for the next SLCo Employee Wellness NDPP cohort. To evaluate if you might have prediabetes, take this free, one minute risk test or watch the following video.



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