



# Information for Patients & Caregivers

## What You Need to Know if Your Child has Diabetes

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There is a hormone in the body called **insulin** that regulates our blood sugar level. It is produced from a gland called **pancreas** located close to the stomach.

Insulin transfers glucose from the blood to the cells of the body. If the pancreas does not produce insulin, glucose builds up in the blood and causes harm.

## WHAT IS DIABETES?

⊕ Diabetes is a condition in which the blood sugar level becomes too high. This can be due to either a lack of insulin production or resistance to insulin's action in the body.

There are two main types of diabetes:

- Type 1 diabetes.
- Type 2 diabetes.

**Type 1 diabetes** occurs when the body produces little or no insulin. Sugar then builds up in the blood and causes damage to the blood vessels, kidneys, and other parts of the body.

**Type 2 diabetes** usually develops slowly and is increasingly common among overweight and obese children in Qatar.

The main symptoms of both types of diabetes are:

- Intense thirst or dry mouth.
- Frequent urge to urinate than usual.
- Increasing tiredness or weakness.
- Weight loss.
- Blurred vision.

In extreme cases, type 1 diabetes can also cause:

- Nausea or vomiting.
- Pain in the abdomen.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Death

Diabetes has no cure, but there are treatments to control it successfully. If your child has any of these symptoms, see a doctor immediately.

## ⊕ WHAT CAUSES DIABETES?

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs when the body's immune system destroys the cells in the pancreas that makes insulin. But often no cause is found.

The risk factors for developing type 1 diabetes include:

- A positive family history of diabetes.
- Presence of other autoimmune diseases.

Type 2 diabetes results from resistance to insulin action in the body. Factors that increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes include:

- Being overweight or obese.
- Low physical activity.
- Low birth weight.
- Being born to a mother who had diabetes during pregnancy.
- Babies born prematurely.
- Belonging to certain race such as African, Afro-Caribbean or South-Asian.

## ⊕ WHEN SHOULD THE CHILD SEE A DOCTOR?

Your child should see a doctor as soon as possible if he or she has any of the following features:

- One or more of the diabetic symptoms listed in this leaflet.
- Persistent infections or slow wound healing.
- Persistently high sugar reading despite taking the prescribed medicines.

Your child should see a doctor immediately if he or she develops:

- A sweet-smelling breath, shortness of breath, and vomiting.
- Drowsiness or loss of consciousness.

## ⊕ WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WILL DO

To find out if your child has diabetes, your doctor will ask questions about the symptoms and any family history of diabetes.

Your doctor will also examine your child, measure his or her weight and order some tests to confirm the diagnosis. These tests may include:

- **A random blood sugar test or finger prick test:** This is a quick test to check for how much sugar is present in the blood.
- **Fasting blood sugar test:** Your doctor may also order this test to confirm the diagnosis of diabetes.
- **A urine test:** To examine the levels of sugar and ketones in the urine. Ketones are chemicals produced by the body when it uses fat as fuel instead of sugar.
- **Haemoglobin A1C test:** This test measures the amount of red blood cells in the blood that are coated with sugar. This is a good way of knowing how well controlled the sugar level is.

If the diagnosis is confirmed, the doctor may start treatment immediately, or refer your child to the hospital for specialist treatment. If the condition of your child is severe, the doctor will admit him or her for immediate care.

It can be frightening or overwhelming if your child is diagnosed with diabetes.

If you have questions about why it developed, what it means for the long-term health of your child, and how it will affect his or her everyday life, please speak to your doctor.

## ⊕ TREATMENTS FOR DIABETES

Treatments usually depend on the type of diabetes. The main goal of treatment is to keep the blood sugar levels within the normal range.

For children with type 2 diabetes, there are two ways to achieve this goal:

**Lifestyle Advice:** Your doctor will start treatment by recommending lifestyle changes such as:

- **Eating healthy balanced diets.** To control your child's weight and ability to produce and respond to insulin. The doctor may refer him or her to a dietitian for counselling.
- **Regular exercise** to improve your child's response to insulin.

**Oral Medicines:** Doctors may prescribe medications if lifestyle changes alone do not keep your child's blood sugar level under control.

**Insulin injection or pump:** This is the main treatment for children with type 1 diabetes. Insulin works by directly lowering the sugar level in the blood.

**Blood sugar monitoring.** You will need to measure your child's blood sugar level regularly using a device called a *blood glucose meter*. The doctor or nurse will teach you how to use this device.



## ⊕ HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD

You can help your child by doing the following:

- **Ensure your child takes the prescribed medications** as instructed.
- **Speak to your doctor about how to adapt your child's medications**, especially if he or she is unwell and unable to eat.
- **Ensure your child is up to date with his or her vaccinations.**
- **Ensure your child eats a healthy diet** based on the advice of the dietitian.
- **Ensure your child is exercising regularly.**
- **School plan.** Ensure your child's school is aware of his or her diabetes. The school will work with you and the doctor to make a written plan on how to manage your child's condition during school hours.

**IMPORTANT TIP:** Try to keep a home diary of the blood sugar readings in your child. This will help you to monitor his or her progress.

## ⊕ FOLLOW UP

Your child should see his or her doctor regularly for check-ups and follow-up treatments after discharge from the hospital.

It is important to realise that as children grow rapidly during childhood, their insulin doses need to be adjusted regularly and reviewed at each clinic visit.



## ⊕ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on Diabetes in Children and Adolescents can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) Qatar.

The guideline is available to the public from the MoPH website: [www.moph.gov.qa](http://www.moph.gov.qa)

