



Sugars and Type 2 Diabetes

What is Type 2 diabetes?

Diabetes is a lifelong condition where the **glucose** (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body is unable to regulate it properly. There are two types of diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2. Type 2 diabetes is the most common and is mainly influenced by lifestyle factors. Sometimes Type 2 diabetes is also referred to as “non-insulin-dependent” diabetes.

What causes Type 2 diabetes?

Insulin is a hormone responsible for regulating the sugar levels in the blood. It moves sugar from blood into the cells of the body, where it can be processed and turned into energy. However, when you have Type 2 diabetes, your body can no longer produce insulin, nor can it respond to insulin it does produce, which can lead to serious health consequences. Type 2 diabetes complications are a leading cause of blindness, limb amputations and kidney dialysis.

How common is diabetes?

Diabetes is a growing health problem within the UK with **3.2 million people** currently diagnosed with diabetes and a further 630,000 estimated to be undiagnosed. It is thought that by 2025, 5 million people will have been diagnosed with diabetes.

Who is at risk of Type 2 diabetes?

Everyone is at risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Although genes do play some part, the most important risk factor is **obesity**. It accounts for 80-85% of the total risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. This is a major problem in the UK, where almost **2 in 3 people** are either overweight or obese and therefore have a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes at some point in their lives. Other risk groups include:

- ✓ *People of South Asian descent who are six times more likely to develop type 2 diabetes.*
- ✓ *People over the age of 40.*
- ✓ *People with pre-diabetes, i.e. where blood glucose levels are high but not high enough to be classified as diabetes.*

Sugars and Type 2 diabetes:

A **high sugar diet** greatly increases the risk of getting Type 2 diabetes. This occurs:

1. **Indirectly:** because eating and drinking lots of sugar leads to obesity, which can lead to diabetes.

2. **Directly:** because it has been shown that there is a direct link between drinking sugary drinks and the development of Type 2 diabetes.

Preventing type 2 diabetes:

The good news is that you can prevent Type 2 diabetes with some simple lifestyle changes. These include **improving diet** by eating plenty of fruit and vegetables and cutting down your consumption of food and drinks that are high in sugar or fat. It is best to avoid eating more **than 7 teaspoons/cubes of sugar per day (=30g)**.



Exercise is a major way to reduce obesity and therefore your chances of developing Type 2 diabetes. Try to practise some form of moderate intensity exercise for **half an hour a day**. Examples of moderate intensity exercise include a fast walk, jogging, swimming or tennis. Try to choose something that you enjoy and start slowly, because you are more likely to stick to it.

Key points:

- **Consuming foods and drinks that are high in sugars increases your chances of developing Type 2 diabetes.**
- **By reducing the amount of sugars in your diet and exercising regularly you can prevent the development of Type 2 diabetes.**

Tips on how to eat less sugar:

1. **Cut down gradually on the amount of sugars you add to your food and drink**
2. **Remove sugar, syrup and honey from the table**
3. **Instead of adding sugar to food like cereal or yoghurt, try fresh fruit**
4. **When baking, cut the sugar in your recipe by one third to one half**
5. **Instead of adding sugar in recipes, try adding almonds, vanilla, orange or lemon.**
6. **Buy sugar-free, low-calorie drinks.**
7. **Compare the sugars content of different foods and choose the lower calorie option.**
8. **Use [FoodSwitch UK](#) to help you find food and drink with less sugar.**