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## HEALTH BYTES

# Diabetes 101

Many South Africans live with diabetes, but not everyone understands what it is or how serious it can be.

## What is diabetes?

Your body uses sugar (glucose) from food to give you energy. This sugar is moved into your cells by a hormone called **insulin**, which is made by the **pancreas**.

If you're not producing enough insulin, the sugar stays in your blood. This is called **high blood sugar**, and over time it can damage your organs, nerves, and blood vessels.

## Types of diabetes

### Type 1

- The immune system attacks insulin-producing cells, so the pancreas can't make insulin.
- Usually starts in childhood or adolescence and is triggered by a combination of genetics and the environment, such as a virus.
- It's irreversible and life-threatening without insulin and strict lifestyle management.

### Type 2

- The pancreas either can't produce enough insulin or your body resists it.
- Usually occurs later in life.
- Risks include family history, poor diet, chronic stress, insufficient exercise and excess weight.
- Treatment requires lifestyle changes and medication.
- If caught early, type 2 diabetes may be reversible.

### Gestational diabetes

- Around 1 in 20 pregnancies leads to temporary insulin resistance, which could cause premature birth, large babies and other complications.
- Usually resolves after birth, but both mother and child now have a higher lifetime risk of Type 2.

### Type 3C

- Caused by conditions such as cystic fibrosis, cancer or damage to the pancreas
- Can decrease or stop insulin production.
- Usually permanent and insulin-dependent.

Source: Diabetes UK

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## Warning signs

- Feeling very thirsty or needing to urinate often
- Feeling very hungry
- Losing weight quickly (especially in Type 1)
- Blurry vision
- Cuts and wounds that heal slowly
- Getting sick often

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