

## DIABETES

The exact causes of diabetes are unknown. In most cases, hereditary and lifestyle play a part. Certain treatable risk factors – such as high blood pressure, obesity and smoking – also accelerate the progression and/or severity of diabetes. Of hospitalizations between 1995 and 1999, diabetes was a contributing factor of 32 per cent of heart attacks, 30 per cent of strokes, 51 per cent of new dialysis patients and 70 per cent of amputations.

Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death in Ontario and Canada. About 900,000 Ontarians currently live with diabetes (8.8 per cent of the province's population) and the number is expected to increase to 1.2 million in Ontario by 2010. In addition to the human costs of the illness, the disease has a significant impact on the provincial health care system with diabetes and its complications costing the province over \$5 billion a year.

There are two main types of diabetes: type 1 and type 2. A third type, gestational diabetes, is usually a temporary condition that occurs during pregnancy.

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas is unable to produce insulin. Insulin is a hormone that helps the body control the level of glucose (sugar) in the blood. Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in childhood and adolescence. About 10 per cent of people with diabetes have type 1 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body does not effectively use the insulin that is produced. It usually develops in adulthood, though children can develop type 2 diabetes as well. Type 2 diabetes accounts for most of the remaining 90 per cent of people with the illness.

Certain lifestyle changes (such as a healthy diet and regular exercise) as well as taking medication can help maintain glucose levels in the blood, helping people reduce complications and live healthier lives.

If left untreated or improperly managed, diabetes can result in a variety of complications. About 30 per cent of people with diabetes are hospitalized with a heart attack and over 30 per cent with a stroke. It is the leading cause of adult blindness and amputations, and is also the leading cause of kidney disease.

There is no cure for diabetes. But a healthy diet, regular exercise, and medication help manage diabetes and lessen the effects of the disease.