

Diabetes and Smoking

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition in which the body has trouble processing food to give you energy. When you have diabetes, your body can't make or use an important hormone called insulin. Normally, insulin helps you get energy from the food you eat. People with diabetes often need insulin shots to control the disease. Without insulin, sugars from food build up in your blood – this is why you hear people talk about “blood sugar levels.” Too much sugar in the blood causes serious health problems, including heart disease, blindness, kidney failure, and infections in the hands and feet (which sometimes lead to amputation).

Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in childhood. Type 2 diabetes is much more common than type 1. It tends to start later in adulthood, and is often linked with obesity and other risk factors, including smoking.

Symptoms of diabetes include:

- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst
- Unexplained weight loss
- Extreme hunger
- Sudden vision changes
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet
- Sores that are slow to heal
- Feeling very tired much of the time

How Does Smoking Affect Diabetes?

The poisons in tobacco smoke affect your blood sugar. That means that smoking increases your chances of having type 2 diabetes. If you have diabetes and you smoke, your risk for kidney disease is 2 to 3 times higher than if you don't smoke. Kidney disease can mean you need to be hooked up to a dialysis machine to clean toxins from your blood. Smokers with diabetes have a higher risk for heart disease and for eye disease that causes blindness.

Smoking with diabetes can lead to nerve damage, which causes numbness, pain, weakness and poor circulation. This nerve damage can lead to needing amputations.

For people with diabetes, the health benefits of quitting smoking begin immediately.

When You Stop Smoking

- You will have an easier time controlling your diabetes.
- Your risk of having nerve damage goes down.
- Your blood circulation will improve and you're less likely to need amputation.
- You'll lower your risk for heart attack, stroke, and kidney disease.



Thinking about quitting or ready to quit? Find help here.

MaineHealth
Center for Tobacco
Independence