

Prediabetes vs. diabetes: Pay attention to both

In last week's State of the Union Address, President Joe Biden renewed a call to cap the price of insulin for people with diabetes.

Five days later, the condition got nationwide attention again when singer Nick Jonas, a type 1 diabetic, starred in a Super Bowl commercial promoting a product that monitors your glucose level.

And a [recent report](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicted a rapid rise in cases of diabetes in young people over the next few decades.

It's a good thing that influencers and medical professionals continue to preach diabetes awareness, says [Uche Allanah, MD](#), an internal medicine physician with OSF HealthCare based in Danville, Illinois. That's because if undiagnosed or untreated, diabetes can be fatal.

"It's alarming," Dr. Allanah says, referring to the number of patients she sees with symptoms or precursors of diabetes.

Prediabetes vs. diabetes

Diabetes is a disorder that affects how your body uses blood sugar, from which our blood cells get energy. Type 1 diabetes is when an autoimmune reaction stops your body from making insulin. Without insulin, blood sugar cannot move out of your bloodstream and into cells. With Type 2, your body still produces insulin but doesn't use it efficiently. Gestational diabetes occurs in pregnant women. Diabetes symptoms include increased urination, increased thirst, increased hunger and unexplained weight loss.

Dr. Allanah says prediabetes describes when you are at risk for diabetes because your blood sugar is higher than normal. She says a blood test is necessary to diagnose prediabetes because you don't present with symptoms. In fact, the [American Medical Association](#) says of the one in three U.S. adults with prediabetes, more than 80% don't know they have it.

"It's important to identify prediabetes because you can stall the development of diabetes and actually prevent a patient from becoming diabetic," Dr. Allanah says.

Risk factors for prediabetes include obesity, sleep apnea and polycystic ovary syndrome in women. Providers also look at a person's family history of the disease, and Dr. Allanah says certain groups -- African Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, Asian Americans and American Indians -- are at higher risk.

Dr. Allanah advises everyone to have regular checkups with their primary care provider to keep an eye on the risk factors you can control. Also, practice healthy habits from a young age.

"Eat right. Avoid processed food," Dr. Allanah advises. "Exercise. A lot of people are sedentary, especially due to the pandemic. People who went to the gym no longer workout. Even now that the stay-at-home orders have been lifted, some people are just not back into their previous lifestyle."

Dr. Allanah also says a prediabetes or diabetes diagnosis is a lot to handle. Some people may have to learn to safely give themselves shots. Others may have to constantly watch for low blood sugar to avoid fainting. Providers realize this and will be there to answer questions. But Dr. Allanah says it's not

uncommon for someone to see a mental health provider to talk about the emotional toll of the diagnosis.

Learn more

Learn more about diabetes care on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).