

Can skinny people get type 2 diabetes?

When you hear people talk about "[type 2 diabetes](#)," you might immediately think of being overweight or obese. While it's true that carrying excess weight is a significant risk factor, type 2 diabetes doesn't occur to only people with higher body mass indexes (BMI). Even if you appear thin or have a healthy weight, you can still develop type 2 diabetes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 10% of people with type 2 diabetes are of normal weight.¹ This shows that diabetes is influenced by many factors beyond just body weight.

What is type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes is a chronic condition where your body becomes resistant to insulin and doesn't produce enough insulin to regulate your blood sugar. Insulin is a hormone your pancreas makes that helps glucose enter your cells for energy. When your cells don't respond to insulin effectively, glucose builds up in your bloodstream, causing high blood sugar levels.

High blood sugar levels can lead to serious complications over time, including heart disease, kidney damage, nerve issues, and vision problems. Diabetes is commonly associated with lifestyle choices like an unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, and excess weight, but did you know genetics and other hidden factors can also play a significant role?

Think you're too thin for diabetes? Think again

You may have heard the common belief that only "people who "are overweight or obese develop type 2 diabetes. This myth likely stems from the strong association between obesity and diabetes, as research shows that obesity increases the risk of developing the condition. But here's the truth - being thin doesn't make you "immune" to this condition. You can develop type 2 diabetes regardless of your body size, especially if you have other risk factors such as genetics, a poor diet, or an inactive lifestyle.

Why do skinny people get type 2 diabetes?

Several factors explain why you might develop type 2 diabetes even if you're thin:

- **Genetics.** Your genetics play a significant role in your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. If you have a family history of the disease, you may be more likely to develop it regardless of your body weight. The lifetime risk of developing diabetes is 40% if you have one parent with diabetes, but increases to 70% if both of your parents are affected.² Certain ethnic groups, such as South Asians, Native Americans, and African Americans, are also at higher genetic risk.
- **Visceral Fat.** Where fat is stored in your body matters more than total body weight when it comes to diabetes risk.^{3,4} Visceral fat, which surrounds your internal organs, is particularly harmful because it produces inflammatory substances that can contribute to insulin resistance. Even if you're thin, having a high amount of visceral fat, often called "thin outside, fat inside" or TOFI can increase your risk of diabetes.

- **Sedentary Lifestyle.** Even if you're not overweight, a lack of physical activity can raise your risk of developing diabetes.⁵ Regular exercise improves insulin sensitivity and helps your body use glucose more effectively.
- **Diet.** A poor diet high in refined carbohydrates and sugary foods can cause blood sugar spikes and lead to insulin resistance over time.⁶ A poor diet can lead to issues even if you're thin.
- **Age.** Age is another risk factor for type 2 diabetes. As you age, your body becomes less efficient at processing glucose, increasing your risk of insulin resistance.
- **Gestational Diabetes.** Gestational diabetes occurs when your blood sugar levels rise during pregnancy, even if you didn't have diabetes before. It affects approximately 9% of pregnancies in the U.S. each year. Here's something to consider: nearly half of women diagnosed with gestational diabetes go on to develop type 2 diabetes later in life.⁷

How can you recognize warning signs?

If you're skinny and have type 2 diabetes, you might not fit the typical image of someone with the condition. This can lead to a delay in diagnosis, as you or your healthcare provider might not immediately suspect diabetes. However, recognizing the symptoms early can make a significant difference in preventing complications and managing the condition effectively.

- **Frequent Urination:** If you find yourself running to the bathroom more often than usual, especially at night, it could be a sign that your body is trying to get rid of extra glucose through your urine.
- **Increased Thirst:** Along with frequent urination, constantly feeling thirsty is your body's response to dehydration caused by high blood sugar levels. You may feel the need to drink water constantly without feeling satisfied.
- **Unexplained Weight Loss:** Losing weight without trying could indicate that your body is breaking down muscle and fat for energy because it's unable to use glucose effectively.
- **Fatigue:** Constant tiredness or lack of energy, even after rest, might result from your body's inability to properly convert glucose into energy.
- **Blurred Vision:** High blood sugar can cause swelling in the lenses of your eyes, leading to temporary changes in vision.
- **Slow Healing of Wounds or Infections:** High blood sugar impairs your body's ability to heal and fight off infections, so cuts, bruises, or infections may take longer to heal.

Ignoring these symptoms can allow type 2 diabetes to progress unchecked, increasing the risk of long-term complications such as nerve damage (neuropathy), kidney disease, heart disease, and vision loss.

If you notice any of these symptoms, consult your health care provider. They may recommend blood tests, such as fasting blood glucose, hemoglobin A1c, or an oral glucose tolerance test, to confirm a diagnosis. The **Fasting Blood Glucose Test** measures your blood sugar levels after an overnight fast. A result of 126 mg/dL or higher typically indicates diabetes. The **Hemoglobin A1c Test** reflects your average blood sugar levels over the past three months, with an A1c level of 6.5% or higher suggesting diabetes. Additionally, the **Oral Glucose Tolerance Test (OGTT)** evaluates how your body processes sugar after drinking a glucose solution. A blood sugar level of 200 mg/dL or higher two hours after the test indicates diabetes.

Preventing type 2 diabetes in thin individuals

You can't change certain risk factors like your genetics or age, but you *can* lower your chances of developing type 2 diabetes by taking a few proactive steps:

Maintain a healthy diet

Eat a [balanced diet](#) with plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Limit refined carbohydrates, sugary drinks, and processed foods. For example, including high-fiber foods like oats and legumes can help regulate your blood sugar levels.

Stay physically active

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week, such as walking, cycling, or swimming. One study found that people with sedentary lifestyles, regardless of their weight, have nearly twice the risk of developing type 2 diabetes than people who are active.⁵ Strength training exercises, like resistance band workouts or weightlifting, can help you build muscle mass and improve insulin sensitivity.

Monitor your health

Schedule regular check-ups to identify any risk factors early. If you have a family history of diabetes, talk with your health care provider about screening options. A simple blood test can help your healthcare provider assess your risk for insulin resistance or diabetes.

Manage stress

When you're under stress, your body releases the hormone cortisol, which helps you respond to immediate challenges. However, prolonged elevation of cortisol can lead to insulin resistance by impairing your body's ability to regulate blood sugar effectively.

Practice [stress-reducing activities](#) such as yoga, meditation, or deep breathing exercises. Lowering your stress levels can help regulate cortisol and decrease your risk of diabetes.

Prioritize sleep

Aim for 7-9 hours of quality [sleep](#) every night. Establish a regular sleep schedule and create an [evening routine](#). In one study, researchers found those with the most irregular sleep patterns had a 34 percent higher chance of developing diabetes.⁸

Quit smoking

If you smoke, your risk of developing type 2 diabetes is 30% to 40% higher compared to non-smokers.⁹ But here's the good news: when you quit, your body starts managing blood sugar levels more effectively in as little as 8 weeks.¹⁰

Living with type 2 diabetes

If you're diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, don't panic. Managing diabetes as a thin individual involves the same core strategies as it does for those who are overweight: a balanced diet, regular physical activity, blood sugar monitoring, and stress management. While some people can manage their condition with diet and exercise alone, many require medications to keep their blood sugar under control.

If you experience symptoms like frequent urination or fatigue, consider contacting your healthcare provider. Remember, diabetes can affect anyone; recognizing the signs can make all the difference in early detection and management.

Managing type 2 diabetes involves more than just controlling blood sugar levels; it's about adopting a comprehensive approach. At WellMed, our expert team is here to support you every step of the way. We offer comprehensive screenings, personalized treatment plans, and compassionate care designed to fit your unique needs. Whether you're looking for preventive guidance or need help managing diabetes, we'll work with you to create a plan that works for you.

Ready to take charge of your health? Start your journey today by scheduling a visit to WellMed. Our expert team is here to offer personalized care and support for all your healthcare needs. Call us at 1-888-781-9355 to book your appointment - because your health deserves the best!

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