

DiabetesSisters is honored to work with a wide variety of organizations, companies, institutions, health systems, government agencies, diabetes bloggers, and online communities serving people with diabetes in order to reach more women with diabetes with our messages of healthy living and positive peer support. We are grateful for the support of the organizations that have supported the creation and distribution of this brochure.

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## No Woman Should Walk Alone in her Diabetes Journey

More than 15 million women in the U.S. and 181 million women worldwide are currently living with diabetes. They quietly face unique challenges every day such as fluctuating blood sugars due to pregnancy, menses, and menopause. For reasons not fully understood, women with diabetes also face increased health risks with heart disease, depression, eating disorders, osteoporosis, and ketoacidosis. And they also report higher levels of loneliness and isolation.



### Our Mission

To improve the health and quality of life of women with, and at risk for, diabetes and to advocate on their behalf.

### Our Vision

A world where women are fully empowered to effectively manage their diabetes.



info@diabetessisters.org • www.diabetessisters.org



# 5 THINGS AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN WITH DIABETES NEED TO KNOW



**WOMEN  
DIABETES  
LIFE**

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## What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition characterized by hyperglycemia (high blood sugar), resulting in the body's inability to properly use blood glucose or produce insulin. There are various types of diabetes, including:

**Type 1 diabetes**—the pancreas no longer makes insulin and therefore blood glucose cannot enter the cells to be used for energy. Individuals with type 1 diabetes require insulin for survival. The cause of type 1 diabetes is unknown, but the occurrence is greater if one of the parents or siblings also has type 1 diabetes.

**Type 2 diabetes**—either the pancreas does not make enough insulin or the body is unable to use insulin correctly. Individuals with type 2 diabetes can manage the disease with a variety of treatments, including medication, diet, and exercise. The cause of type 2 diabetes is a result of various factors including family history of type 2 diabetes, age, physical inactivity, excess weight, gestational diabetes, and race/ethnicity.

**Gestational diabetes**—occurs in pregnant women, and the pancreas is not at fault. Instead, the problem is in the placenta, which provides nourishment to the baby. It also produces additional hormones that interfere with the body's usual response to insulin, causing insulin resistance. When a woman cannot produce extra insulin, blood glucose levels stay abnormally high. Women with gestational diabetes can treat the disease with diet, exercise, and in some cases, insulin. Gestational diabetes usually disappears after pregnancy, but women who have experienced it are at greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

All types of diabetes require monitoring of blood glucose levels to ensure better control of the disease and fewer complications.

As an African-American woman, you are more at risk in developing diabetes, and as a result, you also have increased health risks. Here are the top five things you need to know about diabetes, how to treat it, and how to find support you may need during your journey.

- 1. Diabetes is more prevalent among African-American women than it is in other ethnic groups.** It is 33% more common among African Americans than Caucasians, affects 1 in 4 women ages 55 years and older, and is the fourth leading cause of death for all ages.
- 2. African-American women are diagnosed with all kinds of diabetes.** Type 1 diabetes accounts for 5 to 10 percent of all cases among African Americans, while type 2 diabetes accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all cases. In every age group, the prevalence of diabetes is higher among African-American women than among African-American men.
- 3. Women with diabetes are more apt to experience depression.** Individuals with diabetes are at a higher risk of experiencing depression than the general population. Women with diabetes have a 29% higher risk of depression—and for those taking insulin, the risk increases to 53%—compared to women without diabetes. African-American women experience depression with sadness, anxiety, and helplessness, especially when living with chronic illness. Depression may increase if diabetes complications appear or heighten.
- 4. Diabetes is linked to the other health risks, including:**
  - a. Eye disease, such as diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema (DME), cataract, and glaucoma**—Individuals with all types of diabetes are at risk for eye disease. Women who develop or have diabetes during pregnancy may have rapid onset or worsening of diabetic eye disease.
  - b. Kidney Disease**—About 30% of individuals with type 1 diabetes and 10-40% of those with type 2 diabetes may suffer from kidney disease. High blood sugar can damage the kidneys by filtering too much blood, causing them to leak and lose protein.

- c. Neuropathy (Nerve Damage)**—About half of individuals with diabetes have some form of nerve damage, which is caused by blood sugar levels being too high for a long period of time. Nerve damage affects all areas of the body, including feet, legs and arms, and even the digestive and urinary systems. For women, nerve damage can also affect sexual function.

- 5. Women with diabetes can live healthy lives.** There is a good chance that you know another woman at-risk of or already living with diabetes. While there is no cure for diabetes, with proper treatment, diabetes can be managed. Research shows that simple lifestyle changes like maintaining a healthy weight, lowering fat intake, eating well-balanced meals, and making physical activity a habit can help manage type 2 diabetes and reduce complications.

## Treatment for Women Living With Diabetes

Treatment options for women living with diabetes should include a knowledgeable medical team to focus on both the mental and physical aspects of the disease. Blood glucose control is a major focus of managing diabetes successfully. Understanding the disease is paramount in management.

## Resources

**American Diabetes Association:** [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)  
**Black Women's Health Imperative:** [www.bwhi.org](http://www.bwhi.org)  
**DiabetesSisters:** [www.diabetessisters.org](http://www.diabetessisters.org)  
**Indiana Minority Health Coalition:** [www.imhc.org](http://www.imhc.org)  
**Latino Health Organization:** [www.latinohalthorg.org](http://www.latinohalthorg.org)  
**Office of Minority Health:** [www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov](http://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov)

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