

NORMAL SIGNS OF AGING – OR DIABETES?

PAY ATTENTION TO THESE FIVE SNEAKY SYMPTOMS

You're approaching 50 and can't help but notice the signs of aging – your vision and hearing aren't what they used to be, and it seems your cuts and bruises take longer to heal. But before you write off those and other symptoms as a normal part of getting older, be forewarned that they actually might be indicators of diabetes.

Your risk of developing type 2 diabetes begins increasing as you age, especially if you are overweight (even if by only 10 pounds). Factors such as a family history of diabetes, high blood pressure, high triglyceride levels, low HDL cholesterol and being African American, Latino, American Indian or Asian also can put you at increased risk. Type 2 diabetes is considered "silent" because the signs are subtle. In fact, 7 million Americans have type 2 diabetes but don't realize it. (Type 1 diabetes is more common in children and young adults.) Type 2 diabetes affects the way your body metabolizes sugar (glucose), your body's main source of fuel. While a healthy body turns glucose into energy, in people with type 2 diabetes the glucose continues to build, leading to high blood sugar, causing a variety of symptoms.

The American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE) recommends asking your doctor about getting tested for diabetes if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms, particularly if you are 45 or older. Are you:

- **Finding it more difficult to see or hear clearly?** Everyone around you seems to be mumbling all of the sudden and you find yourself squinting to clear your blurry vision. Hearing loss is twice as common in people with diabetes as in those who don't have the disease, according to research. Doctors aren't sure why, but believe it might be because diabetes damages blood vessels and nerves in the body, including those in the ear. Build-up of glucose in the blood can damage your eyesight, too, by distorting the shape of the lens in your eye and making your vision blurry.
- **Feeling tired and grouchy?** You're getting older, so you get tired more easily, right? Perhaps. Or maybe because of type 2 diabetes your body isn't effectively converting glucose to energy and so you feel exhausted all of the time. And when you're tired, you're irritable.
- **Experiencing odd symptoms?** Other unexpected indications of diabetes include dry, itchy skin, the development of darkening and velvety patches of skin around the neck or other parts of the body, cuts and bruises that don't heal and tingling and numbness of the hands and feet. Many of these symptoms occur because the blood vessels and nerves are damaged by the excessive amounts of glucose.
- **Feeling hungry – all the time?** When your body doesn't use glucose effectively, it needs more fuel, so you feel hungry and eat frequently.
- **Going to the bathroom a lot but always thirsty?** These signs of diabetes are related. If you have diabetes, your body tries to get rid of the glucose that's building in your blood by causing you to urinate frequently. When you go to the bathroom a lot, you lose a lot of fluid, making you dehydrated and thirsty.

The good news is that diabetes is manageable. A diabetes educator can help people with prediabetes or diabetes be as healthy as possible by talking with them about the best ways to manage their condition to fit their lifestyle.

Find a diabetes educator near you: www.diabeteseducator.org