

# Diabetes rising rapidly among U.S. kids

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Both type 1 and type 2 disease rates up more than 20 percent in past decade, finds study.

(HealthDay) -- Diabetes is increasing among U.S. children at an alarming rate, say researchers who report jumps of more than 20 percent since 2001 for type 2 disease, which is linked to excessive weight and sedentary lifestyles, and type 1 diabetes, which is an autoimmune disease.

"Both types of [diabetes](#) are increasing," said study co-author Dr. Dana Dabelea, associate dean for faculty affairs at the University of Colorado School of Public Health in Aurora. "For type 2, we have some clues as to why it's increasing, but for type 1, we still need to better understand the triggers of this disease."

Many of the type 2 diagnoses are explained by the rise in overweight and [obese children](#). According to the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 17 percent of U.S. children and teens are obese -- three

times the number of a generation ago.

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly turns on healthy cells responsible for producing insulin, a hormone needed to metabolize the carbohydrates in food. It's been suggested that exposure to certain viruses may trigger the onset of type 1 diabetes. It is not linked to [lifestyle factors](#), such as being overweight.

The exact cause of type 2 diabetes is less clear. People with type 2 either don't produce enough insulin, or their bodies don't use insulin efficiently. The disease is linked to sedentary lifestyles and to being overweight. However, other factors may be responsible, too. The disease can often be controlled in its early stages with [lifestyle changes](#) that include losing weight and becoming more active.

The first study found that about 189,000 people under the age of 20 had diabetes in the United States. Of those, 168,000 had type 1, and more than 19,000 had type 2.

From 2001 to 2009, the number of American children with type 2 diabetes increased 21 percent, and cases of type 1 ballooned 23 percent, the researchers found.

The study also found that children with type 2 were more likely to have protein in their urine than children with type 1 diabetes, suggesting that they might be at greater risk for early kidney damage. Youngsters with both types of diabetes also showed early indications of damage to the nerve system that regulates the heart and its blood vessels, according to the study.

The researchers also found that children with diabetes who watched more than three hours of television daily had poorer blood sugar control and higher levels of triglycerides, a blood fat, than children who watched

less TV.

Dabelea and her colleagues were scheduled to present their findings on Saturday at the American Diabetes Association annual meeting in Philadelphia. The study was funded by the CDC and the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

In another presentation planned for the meeting, researchers who are also from the University of Colorado studied children with type 2 diabetes and found the disease may progress more rapidly in young people than in older folks. With an average follow-up of just four years, this study found that about one-third of children with type 2 diabetes had high blood pressure, compared to 12 percent at the start of the study. Almost 17 percent showed early signs of kidney damage, and 13 percent had early signs of eye disease.

"Type 2 is not a benign condition in children," said Dabelea.

Dr. Joel Zonszein, director of the clinical diabetes center at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City, said he wasn't surprised by either study's findings on [type 2 diabetes](#).

"We're seeing more children with type 2, and at younger ages. They often have more aggressive disease at the time of diagnosis and other conditions, such as [abnormal cholesterol levels]," he said. "I'm concerned because these are young people being diagnosed with an adult disease, and they will probably progress to cardiovascular disease much faster."

Zonszein was surprised at the dramatic rise in the rates of type 1 diabetes. "I don't know what would cause more autoimmune disease in type 1," he said.

While there are no known ways to prevent [type 1 diabetes](#), both experts said that a healthy lifestyle can go a long way to preventing type 2 in children. Zonszein's first recommendation is to get TVs out of children's bedrooms.

Both Zonszein and Dabelea recommended a healthy diet with lots of fruits and vegetables, and an active lifestyle, not just for the [children](#), but for the whole family.

Data and conclusions presented at meetings should be considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

**More information:** The American Diabetes Association has more information on [type 1 diabetes](#), and [type 2 diabetes](#).

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