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## **Diabetes: What is it?**

When we use the term diabetes, we almost always mean diabetes mellitus. There is another, rare form of diabetes, known as diabetes insipidus, which has nothing to do with blood sugar and is a completely different disease.

Diabetes insipidus is usually due to a tumor in the hypothalamic region in the brain. Blood glucose is normal in these patients.

On the other hand, diabetes mellitus is due to a disease of the pancreas, which results in a high blood glucose level. Markedly elevated blood glucose levels then lead to excessive thirst and excessive urination.

Diabetes mellitus is a progressive disease with horrendous complications, which include heart attack, stroke, memory loss, dementia, impotence, leg amputation, kidney failure and blindness.

Unfortunately, diabetes remains undiagnosed in a large number of patients because it does not cause any symptoms for many years. By the time diabetes is diagnosed, most patients have developed complications of this disease.

According to some conservative estimates, at least 17 million Americans have diabetes. Unfortunately, almost half don't even know they have it. The number of cases of diagnosed diabetes in the U.S. has increased 33% from 1990 to 1998.



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The greatest increase has occurred in the young age group of 30-39 years of age.

In general, people are very concerned about cancer, heart disease and cholesterol, but don't think much about the consequences of diabetes. The advanced complications of diabetes, quite frankly, make for a miserable quality of life.

Patients with advanced complications (such as kidney failure, leg amputation and blindness) often ask why no one warned them diabetes could lead to such a hellish existence.