6 Possible Causes of Type 1 Diabetes

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How Do You Get Type 1 Diabetes?

How do you get type 1 diabetes? Well, first you should know that type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease, which means it is unpreventable and chronic. Autoimmune diseases occur when the body's defense mechanism confuses healthy cells for harmful ones and attacks them.

In the case of type 1 diabetes, the body attacks the insulin-producing beta cells. Insulin is the hormone that metabolizes glucose and without it, blood glucose levels would rise and eventually reach a fatal level. This means that someone living with type 1 diabetes is completely dependent on giving themselves insulin via injections or pump. There is a lot of misinformation on type 1 as it is often compared to or mistaken for type 2 diabetes, which is a completely different disease (not autoimmune, can be managed without dosing insulin).

Possible Causes

To answer "how do you get diabetes?" you should know the exact cause of type 1 diabetes is unknown but there are many speculations and theories, as there are for all autoimmune diseases. Below are the most researched and probable:

1. Virus

When the body's immune system is called to fight a virus, it is possible it may start attacking good cells by accident. It is believed that a body has to be the perfect host for this to occur and that the virus unmasks the autoimmunity that was already present but unknown. This theory is generally the most accepted cause for the onset of an autoimmune disease.

2. Vitamin D

The correlation between those living with type 1 and having low levels of vitamin D is strong. Vitamin D is imperative to having healthy islet (insulin-producing) cells and necessary for their survival. It is believed that low levels of vitamin D can trigger the onset of this chronic disease. It is also much more prevalent in northern, darker countries.

3. Genetics

There is an increased likelihood of developing type 1 diabetes if a parent or sibling has it. If a father has it, there is a 5% chance the gene will be passed down to the children; there is a 3% chance if the mother has it. If a sibling has it, there is an 8% chance others will develop it. As for identical twins, if one twin has it there is a 50% chance the other will also develop it.

4. Stress

Experiencing a highly stressful event, as well as prolonged chronic stress, can possibly trigger this condition. Because the body is sensing some sort of danger it can be catapulted into flight or fight mode, which can send off signals that can mistakenly attack one's good cells. Stress can be the catalyst for many unwanted changed in the body, so it is a good idea to learn how to manage it.

5. Multiple Autoimmune Syndrome (MAS)

About 25% of people living with one autoimmune disease will develop another. This is believed to be because of a susceptible gene pool. Certain autoimmune diseases more frequently occur together. Those living with type 1 diabetes are more likely to develop celiac or Hashimoto's disease and vice versa.

6. Environment

It’s possible that environmental toxins play a role in triggering type 1 diabetes. It’s been proven that everyday chemical toxins have the ability to alter cells and could possibly weaken or cause mutations in one's immune system. These toxins range from air pollution to the BPA in plastic so it is a good idea to reduce toxins in your household wherever possible. Toxins can cause a wide variety of other problems as well.

Understanding the Red Flags

Some warning signs that type 1 diabetes may be developing in the body are increased thirst, frequent urination/bed-wetting, weight loss, exhaustion, weakness, and blurred vision. These symptoms occur when the blood glucose levels in the body start getting dangerously high. Because no insulin is being produced (or very little) the body tries to flush out the sugar with liquids. Unfortunately, this does not work and eventually symptoms will get unmanageable.

If you suspect you may be experiencing symptoms of diabetes, make sure to go to your doctor immediately. If ignored for too long the consequences of untreated type 1 diabetes are fatal. If caught early, no long-term damage will be caused to the body and proper care and management can be provided.

How You Can Prevent It

There’s nothing one can do to prevent the onset of type 1 diabetes. Once diagnosed, it must be managed with the dosing of insulin, whether through injection pens or a pump is up to the patient's accessibility. There is some new research being done that could delay the need for insulin in newly diagnosed diabetics but there is no cure as of yet. If you have been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, there is nothing to be ashamed of or anything you could have done to prevent it. Do your best to take care of your body post-diagnosis in order to reduce the risk of developing another autoimmune disease. This means managing stress and living a healthy, balanced lifestyle.