



Prediabetes and Type 2 Diabetes in Young People: What You Need to Know

The Alarming Numbers

- In the US, 1 in 3 teens (12–17 years) has prediabetes, that's 8.4 million young people.
- The number of people under 40 with type 2 diabetes has risen sharply in the UK (40% increase), Australia (44% increase in ages 21–39), and the US (over half a million new cases in 18–44 year olds).
- Worldwide, type 2 diabetes among people aged 15–39 years has increased by 56% since 1990.

Why It Matters

- Prediabetes and type 2 diabetes in youth is more aggressive than in older adults.
- Complications such as high blood pressure, kidney damage, nerve damage, and vision loss often appear within just a few years of diagnosis.
- If adolescents are diagnosed early, by their mid 20s, they have at least one complication, many have two, with some having severe complications that impact quality of life.
- A JAMA study found young adults with prediabetes have a 68% higher risk of premature death.
- Youths with diabetes often end up taking multiple medications earlier, leading to risks of side effects, long-term health burden and reduced quality of life.
- Vascular changes such as stiff arteries and early signs of atherosclerosis are already seen in teenagers with insulin resistance or prediabetes.

Why This Is Happening

- **Diet:** More sugary drinks, processed foods, and refined carbs.
- **Inactivity:** Screen time replaces physical activity, with most teens missing the recommended 60 minutes of daily movement.
- **Sleep & Stress:** Short sleep and high stress worsen insulin resistance and drive prediabetes and type 2 diabetes.
- **Genetics & Family History:** Risks are triggered earlier due to food and social environments.
- **Environment:** Easy access to junk food, limited access to healthy food, safe activity spaces, lack of education about nutrition and how what we eat influences health.

What Can Be Done

- **Screen Early:** Ask for A1c or fasting glucose tests for kids and teens, especially those at-risk.
- **Change the Environment:** Remove sugary drinks, sugar-filled foods and ultra-processed foods at home and school.
- **Healthy Rewards:** Swap candy and junk food rewards for experiences, praise, small privileges, or creative activities (see ideas below).
- **Move More:** Encourage play, walking, biking, dancing, it doesn't need to be formal exercise.
- **Prioritize Sleep:** Teens need 8+ hours a night to support a healthy metabolism.
- **Community Role:** Support healthier school meals, safe parks, and nutrition education.

Key Takeaway

Prediabetes and type 2 diabetes in youth are not inevitable. With early action, awareness, and support, we can protect young people from a lifetime of complications. Every small step matters—at home, in schools, and in our communities.

Non-Sweet Reward Ideas Children and Youths

The key is making rewards meaningful without linking them to food, especially sweets. Over time, this helps young people see value in experiences, effort, creativity and self-care, while breaking the cycle of associating treats with sugar.

Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extra playtime outside• A trip to the park, pool, or zoo• Choosing the family movie or game night activity• A special outing like bowling, skating, or mini-golf• Time with friends like a sleepover, playdate, or activity together	Privileges <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staying up 15–20 minutes later on weekends• Choosing what’s for dinner or breakfast• Getting to sit in the “special seat” at dinner or in the car• Picking the playlist for a car ride or family activity• A turn-free pass for chores or homework choice (with limits)
Tangible Rewards <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stickers, stamps, or trading cards• Tokens or points to save up for a bigger prize• Books, coloring or activity books, or magazines• Sports gear, art supplies, or hobby kits• A new journal, water bottle, or fun stationery	Recognition <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Verbal praise that celebrates effort, not just results• Certificates, badges, or achievement charts• Family “shout-outs” at dinner• A handwritten note slipped into a lunchbox or backpack• Posting artwork or achievements on the fridge or bulletin board
Self-Care & Relaxation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A bubble bath with fun bath toys or scents• At-home spa activity (face mask, nails, hand massage)• Away-from screen relaxation like a nature walk or time in the park• Cozy corner time with blankets and a new book	Creative Options <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A new craft project• A baking or cooking session (healthy recipes)• DIY science experiment or building activity• Photography scavenger hunt• Starting a small garden or plant project