# WSU Asotin County Extension

## Balancing Life Newsletter

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# Aging

## Flex Your Memory

*By RealAge*

Have you ever driven to the store, only to forget to buy one or more of the items you needed? You could make a list ahead of time, or you could use a handy mnemonic technique to sharpen your memory and remember everything in one stop.

The mnemonic technique relies on the fact that your brain uses information from all your senses -- touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste -- to form your memories.

For example, have you ever noticed how a certain smell can remind you of someone or something from your past? Information from your nose is processed partly by the limbic system, a part of the brain involved in memory and emotion that stores memories.

The more senses engaged while experiencing an event, the more likely you'll be to remember it. For the following brain game, use your imagination to create associations based on your five senses to help you remember something practical, such as that list of grocery items.

### Memory-Making Mnemonic

Suppose you're preparing for a picnic, and you want to remember a list of items to take: napkins, plastic cups, paper plates, chairs, soda, and a potato salad.

First, choose a favorite and familiar place, such as a bedroom, backyard, or neighborhood park, and create a mental map of that place. Imagine the surroundings in as much detail as you can, noticing colors, sounds, smells, and feelings associated with the setting. Can you visualize 5 to 10 objects in this space? These objects are the foundation for your mnemonic -- your memory device; once you fix them in your mind, you can use them to help you remember almost anything.

Let's say your favorite place is your backyard, and you easily visualize a rose bush, a tree, a cobblestone path, a doghouse, a garden hose, and a patio table.

Create an association between each item on your picnic list and one of the objects in the backyard.

For example, you might imagine napkins covering your rose bush, with the thorns sticking through the paper. See plastic cup ornaments hanging from the tree and paper plates lining the cobblestone path. Visualize a stack of chairs sitting on top of the doghouse, soda streaming from the garden hose, and a potato salad spread all over the patio table. The crazier and sillier your associations, the better the memory device will work.

When it's time to get your picnic items together, close your eyes and take a mental walk around your decorated backyard. You'll be sure to remember everything!

## Reaching 100 years of age may be more about attitude and adaptation than health history, study finds

*Athens, Ga.* – University of Georgia research has provided new clues on surviving to be 100 years old, finding that how we feel about ourselves and our ability to adapt to an accumulation of challenging life experiences may be as or more important than health factors.

The research, published in the current edition of the journal *Current Gerontology and Geriatrics Research*, used data collected as part of the Georgia Centenarian Study, one of only two centenarian studies in the country, to measure psychological and social factors in addition to genetics and health of so-called expert survivors. Two hundred forty-four people age 100 years or older were studied between 2001 and 2009. The research found that critical life events and personal history, along with how people adapt to stressful situations and cope with them are crucial to explaining successful aging.

"Understanding health in these terms has huge implications for quality of life," said Leonard Poon, director of the Institute of Gerontology in the UGA College of Public Health and lead author of the study. "What is happening to you matters, but more importantly, it is your perception of what is happening to you that is really important for your individual health."

A majority of past research on the oldest of the old focused on health factors, but the researchers found that centenarians' feelings about their own health, well-being and support systems, rather than measures such as blood pressure and blood sugar are stronger predictors of survival, said Poon. Personality also determined how well the centenarians reacted to life stress and change, and therefore whether they were as happy in their old age as they were when young. Healthy 100-year-olds had personalities described as open and conscientious. Neurotic personalities tended to be less healthy, the study found.

An individual confronted with a stressful situation can either find a quick emotional solution or ruminate on the problem, explained Poon. "One is very destructive in terms of general well-being," he said, "and the other is very adaptive."
Other research drawing from the Georgia Centenarian Study compared physical function of the elderly living in the community with those living in retirement facilities and found that physical activity decreased by approximately one-third when community residents moved to retirement facilities.

A decrease in physical activity accelerates a decline in health, explained Elaine Cress, professor in the Institute of Gerontology and lead author of a related study published in the current issue of the journal *Gerontology*.

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# Type 2 Diabetes in Children

## Definition

By Mayo Clinic staff

*Type 2 diabetes in children is a chronic condition that affects the way your child's body metabolizes sugar (glucose).*

*Type 2 diabetes is a disease more commonly associated with adults. But type 2 diabetes in children is on the rise, fueled largely by the obesity epidemic.*

*There's plenty you can do to help manage or prevent type 2 diabetes in children. Encourage your child to eat healthy foods, get plenty of physical activity and maintain a healthy weight. If diet and exercise aren't enough, your child may need oral medication or insulin treatment to manage his or her blood sugar.*

## Symptoms

By Mayo Clinic staff

*Type 2 diabetes in children may develop gradually. Some children who have type 2 diabetes have no signs or symptoms. Others experience:*

- **Increased thirst and frequent urination.** As excess sugar builds up in your child's bloodstream, fluid is pulled from the tissues. This may leave your child thirsty. As a result, your child may drink — and urinate — more than usual.
- **Increased hunger.** Without enough insulin to move sugar into your child's cells, your child's muscles and organs become depleted for energy. This triggers intense hunger.
- **Weight loss.** Despite eating more than usual to relieve hunger, your child may lose weight. Without the energy sugar supplies, muscle tissues and fat stores simply shrink.
- **Fatigue.** If your child's cells are deprived of sugar, he or she may become tired and irritable.
- **Blurred vision.** If your child's blood sugar is too high, fluid may be pulled from the lenses of your child's eyes. This may affect your child's ability to focus clearly.

- **Slow-healing sores or frequent infections.** Type 2 diabetes affects your child's ability to heal and resist infections.
- **Areas of darkened skin.** Some children who have type 2 diabetes have patches of dark, velvety skin in the folds and creases of their bodies — usually in the armpits and neck. This condition, called acanthosis nigricans, may be a sign of insulin resistance.

## When to see a doctor

*To diagnose type 2 diabetes before it does serious damage, diabetes screening is recommended for all children and adolescents at high risk of type 2 diabetes, even if they have no signs or symptoms of the condition. Those considered at high risk include children:*

- With a body mass index (BMI) over the 85th percentile
- With a sibling, parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle or cousin with type 2 diabetes
- Who are Black, Hispanic, Native American or Asian-American, as these racial groups have a higher incidence of type 2 diabetes
- With signs of insulin resistance, such as darkened skin on the neck

*Talk to your child's doctor if you're concerned about diabetes or if you notice any of the signs or symptoms of type 2 diabetes — increased thirst and frequent urination, extreme hunger, weight loss, blurred vision, fatigue, slow-healing sores or frequent infections.*

## Causes

By Mayo Clinic staff

*Type 2 diabetes develops when the body becomes resistant to insulin or when the pancreas stops producing enough insulin. Exactly why this happens is unknown, although excess weight and inactivity seem to be important factors.*

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**Reaching 100**

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"By understanding physical decline in functioning, caregivers can help maintain a high quality of life for the centenarian with appropriate support," said Cress, who also is a faculty member in the department of kinesiology in the UGA College of Education. "We developed a scale to assess physical performance, which has not been done before with centenarians. This can be used in future research to predict when people are going to start needing more help. They need to know how to plan, and society needs to know how to plan, too.

Although still rare, centenarians are a growing segment of the population. Poon notes there were an estimated 50,454 in 2000, but the number is expected to rise to more than 800,000 by 2050, making accurate information about their well-being increasingly important.

Poon added that one phenomenon that occurs all over the world is that women live longer than men. In industrialized countries such as the U.S., France and Japan, five to six women reach 100 years for every man who does. Only Sardinia has a one-to-one ratio. At the opposite extreme, 13 South Korean women live to be 100 for every man.

"Our next phase is to go to four different countries where there are different gender survival ratios and see why they are the same, why they are different and what makes women live longer than men," said Poon.

*The Georgia Centenarian Study is funded by the National Institute on Aging. For more information about the UGA Institute of Gerontology, see www.publichealth.uga.edu/geron/.*

**Type 2 Diabetes**

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- **Insulin: The key for sugar**
  Insulin is a hormone that comes from the pancreas, a gland located just behind the stomach. When your child eats, the pancreas secretes insulin into the bloodstream. As insulin circulates, it acts like a key by unlocking microscopic doors that allow sugar to enter your child's cells. Insulin lowers the amount of sugar in your child's bloodstream. As your child's blood sugar level drops, so does the secretion of insulin from the pancreas.
- **Glucose: The energy source**
  Glucose — sugar — is a main source of energy for the cells that make up muscles and other tissues. Glucose comes from two major sources: the food your child eats and your child's liver. During digestion, sugar is absorbed into the bloodstream. Normally, sugar then enters cells with the help of insulin.
- **Liver: Production and storage**
  The liver acts as a glucose storage and manufacturing center. When your child's insulin levels are low — when your child hasn't eaten in a while, for example — the liver releases the stored glucose to keep your child's glucose level within a normal range.
- In type 2 diabetes, this process works improperly. Instead of moving into your child's cells, sugar builds up in his or her bloodstream. This occurs when your child's pancreas doesn't make enough insulin or your child's cells become resistant to the action of insulin.

## Risk Factors

By Mayo Clinic staff

*Researchers don't fully understand why some children develop type 2 diabetes and others don't, even if they have similar risk factors. It's clear that certain factors increase the risk, however, including:*

- **Weight.** Being overweight is a primary risk factor for type 2 diabetes in children. The more fatty tissue a child has, the more resistant his or her cells become to insulin. The good news is that many children who have type 2 diabetes can improve their blood sugar levels simply by losing excess weight.
- **Inactivity.** The less active your child is, the greater his or her risk of type 2 diabetes. Physical activity helps your child control his or her weight, uses glucose as energy, and makes your child's cells more responsive to insulin.
- **Family history.** The risk of type 2 diabetes increases if a parent or sibling has type 2 diabetes — but it's difficult to tell if this is related to lifestyle, genetics or both.
- **Race.** Although it's unclear why, children of certain races — especially Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and Asian-Americans — are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes.
- **Gender.** Type 2 diabetes is more common in girls than in boys during childhood.

## Complications

By Mayo Clinic staff

*Type 2 diabetes can be easy to ignore, especially in the early stages when your child is feeling fine. But type 2 diabetes must be taken seriously. The condition can affect nearly every major organ in your child's body, including the heart, blood vessels, nerves, eyes and kidneys. Keeping your child's blood sugar level close to normal most of the time can dramatically reduce the risk of these complications.*

*The long-term complications of type 2 diabetes develop gradually. But eventually, diabetes complications may be disabling or even life-threatening.*

- **Heart and blood vessel disease.** Diabetes dramatically increases your child's risk of various cardiovascular problems, including coronary artery disease with chest pain (angina), heart attack, stroke, narrowing of the arteries (atherosclerosis) and high blood pressure.
- **Nerve damage (neuropathy).** Excess sugar can injure the walls of the tiny blood vessels (capillaries) that nourish your child's nerves, especially in the legs. This can cause tingling, numbness, burning or pain that may begin at the tips of the toes or fingers and gradually spread upward. Left untreated, your child could lose all sense of feeling in the affected limbs.
- **Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.** Children with type 2 are more likely to develop nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, which can eventually lead to scarring of the liver and cirrhosis. Weight loss, along with good blood sugar control, may help this condition.
- **Kidney damage (nephropathy).** The kidneys contain millions of tiny blood vessel clusters that filter waste from your child's blood. Diabetes can damage this delicate filtering system. The earlier diabetes develops, the greater the concern. Severe damage can lead to kidney failure or irreversible end-stage kidney disease, requiring dialysis or a kidney transplant.
- **Eye damage.** Diabetes can damage the blood vessels of the retina (diabetic retinopathy). Diabetes can also lead to cataracts and a greater risk of glaucoma.
- **Foot damage.** Nerve damage in the feet or poor blood flow to the feet increases the risk of various foot complications. Left untreated, cuts and blisters can become serious infections.
- **Skin conditions.** Diabetes may leave your child more susceptible to skin problems, including bacterial infections, fungal infections and itching.

When you see the doctor, remember to bring a list of the symptoms your child has been experiencing and questions you have for the doctor. Bringing a notebook to write down the answers the doctor gives you plus other important information is a good idea.