

# The importance of early diagnosis in type 1 diabetes: Challenges and coping strategies

Jessy Catreen\*



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## Description

Type 1 diabetes, a chronic autoimmune condition characterized by the destruction of insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas, poses a significant health challenge worldwide. Timely and accurate diagnosis is essential for initiating appropriate treatment and preventing complications. In this article, we explore the diagnostic journey of type 1 diabetes, shedding light on the clinical manifestations, screening tests, and diagnostic criteria utilized in identifying this complex disease.

### ■ The clinical landscape of type 1 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes often presents with subtle symptoms that can be overlooked or attributed to other causes. Common clinical manifestations include the following factors.

**Polyuria (excessive urination):** Increased urination results from the kidneys' attempt to eliminate excess glucose from the bloodstream.

**Polydipsia (excessive thirst):** Dehydration secondary to polyuria triggers intense thirst.

**Polyphagia (excessive hunger):** Despite increased food intake, individuals may experience weight loss due to the inability of cells to utilize glucose for energy.

**Fatigue and weakness:** Reduced glucose uptake by cells leads to decreased energy production, resulting in fatigue and weakness.

**Blurred vision:** High blood sugar levels can cause fluid imbalances in the eye, leading to visual

disturbances.

### ■ Diagnostic screening tests

Given the nonspecific nature of symptoms, diagnosis of type 1 diabetes relies on a combination of clinical evaluation and laboratory testing. Key screening tests are given below.

**Fasting plasma glucose test:** A blood sample is taken after an overnight fast to measure glucose levels. A fasting plasma glucose level of  $\geq 126$  mg/dL on two separate occasions is indicative of diabetes.

**Oral glucose tolerance test:** This test involves drinking a glucose solution followed by blood glucose measurements at timed intervals. A blood glucose level of  $\geq 200$  mg/dL two hours after glucose ingestion confirms diabetes.

**Hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) test:** This blood test measures the average blood sugar levels over the past two to three months. An HbA1c level of  $\geq 6.5\%$  is diagnostic of diabetes.

**Random plasma glucose test:** A blood sample taken at any time of the day can be used to measure glucose levels. A random plasma glucose level of  $\geq 200$  mg/dL in the presence of classic symptoms of diabetes confirms diagnosis.

### ■ Confirmation of autoimmunity

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition characterized by the presence of autoantibodies directed against pancreatic beta cells. To confirm the autoimmune nature of the disease, additional tests may be performed.

Department of Diabetes, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden

\*Author for correspondence: E-mail: jessycatreen@gmail.com

**Islet cell autoantibodies:** These antibodies target proteins found in pancreatic islet cells, including insulin, Glutamic Acid Decarboxylase (GAD), and insulinoma-associated protein 2 (IA-2).

**Glutamic acid decarboxylase autoantibodies:** GAD is an enzyme involved in the synthesis of Gamma-Amino Butyric Acid (GABA), and autoantibodies against GAD are commonly found in individuals with type 1 diabetes.

**Insulin Auto-Antibodies (IAA):** These antibodies target insulin itself and are indicative of autoimmune destruction of pancreatic beta cells.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have established diagnostic criteria for type 1 diabetes, which includes following criteria.

- Classic symptoms of hyperglycemia (polyuria, polydipsia, polyphagia)

- Random plasma glucose  $\geq 200$  mg/dL
- Fasting plasma glucose  $\geq 126$  mg/dL
- 2-hour plasma glucose  $\geq 200$  mg/dL during an oral glucose tolerance test
- Hemoglobin A1c  $\geq 6.5\%$

The diagnosis of type 1 diabetes is a multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of clinical symptoms, laboratory test results, and autoimmune markers. By employing a comprehensive approach to screening and diagnosis, healthcare providers can accurately identify individuals with type 1 diabetes and initiate timely interventions to optimize management and improve outcomes. As research advances and diagnostic techniques evolve, our understanding of type 1 diabetes continues to deepen, paving the way for enhanced diagnostic accuracy and personalized approaches to care for individuals living with this chronic condition.