

A Review on Diabetes Mellitus

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ABSTRACT

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder that is characterized by chronic hyperglycemia due to defects in insulin secretion, insulin action, or both. The increasing global prevalence of both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes poses a major health burden worldwide. This review provides an overview of the pathophysiology, risk factors, and causes of diabetes, focusing on both genetic and environmental influences. The paper also covers the diagnostic criteria and classification of diabetes, emphasizing the importance of early detection and accurate diagnosis. Current treatment strategies, including insulin therapy, oral antidiabetic agents, and newer classes of medications such as GLP-1 receptor agonists and SGLT2 inhibitors, have significantly improved glycemic control and reduced complications. Additionally, the role of lifestyle and behavioral interventions in managing diabetes is discussed. The review highlights the complications of diabetes, including cardiovascular disease, nephropathy, and neuropathy, and the need for effective management to prevent these outcomes. Advances in diabetes management, such as continuous glucose monitoring, artificial pancreas systems, and emerging therapies like stem cell treatment, are explored. Finally, the review addresses future prospects and research gaps, focusing on personalized medicine, digital health technologies, and regenerative therapies. Despite significant progress, challenges remain, necessitating continued research and innovation to improve patient outcomes and reduce the global burden of diabetes.

Keywords: Diabetes Mellitus, Type I & Type II Diabetes, β -cell.

I. INTRODUCTION TO DIABETES MELLITUS

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic (long-term) metabolic disorder that occurs when the body cannot properly regulate blood sugar (glucose) levels. Glucose is an important source of energy for the body, and insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas, helps move glucose from the blood into the cells. In people with diabetes, either the body

does not produce enough insulin or cannot use insulin effectively. This leads to high blood sugar levels, a condition known as hyperglycemia (CR 1992).

There are three main types of diabetes:

- Type 1 diabetes: This type is caused when the immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. As a result, the body produces little or no insulin. It often appears in children or young adults. (Wilson. 2010) (Bacchetta R 2006) (Atkinson MA 2001)
- Type 2 diabetes: This is the most common type. It occurs when the body becomes resistant to insulin or when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin. It is usually linked to lifestyle factors such as obesity, poor diet, and lack of physical activity (L. A. Wassmuth R 1989).
- Gestational diabetes: This type occurs in some women during pregnancy and usually disappears after childbirth. However, it increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life (Hoet JJ 1996).

Diabetes is a major public health issue around the world. According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), over 537 million adults were living with diabetes in 2021, and this number is expected to rise to 643 million by 2030. India has one of the highest numbers of people with diabetes, earning it the title of "diabetes capital of the world" (Tripathy BB 1997).

If not managed properly, diabetes can lead to serious complications such as heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, nerve damage, and vision loss. However, with early diagnosis, proper treatment, a healthy diet, regular physical activity, and lifestyle changes, people with diabetes can live healthy and active lives (Betterle C 1983).

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND GLOBAL TRENDS:

The pathophysiology of diabetes mellitus involves complex mechanisms related to insulin resistance, pancreatic β -cell dysfunction, and

disturbances in glucose and lipid metabolism. These mechanisms differ between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, but both types result in chronic hyperglycemia, leading to significant organ damage over time (diabetes. 2011).

Mechanisms of Insulin Resistance and β -cell Dysfunction

In Type 2 diabetes, the primary pathological feature is insulin resistance, where peripheral tissues, such as muscle, adipose tissue, and liver, become less responsive to insulin. Insulin resistance results in the inability of cells to properly take up glucose from the bloodstream, causing hyperglycemia. In response, the pancreas initially increases insulin secretion to overcome this resistance. Over time, however, β -cells in the pancreas become dysfunctional, reducing insulin production and contributing to worsening glucose control. This β -cell dysfunction is driven by several factors, including inflammation, oxidative stress, and lipotoxicity, which impair the ability of β -cells to secrete insulin adequately (Zimmet P 2001).

In Type 1 diabetes, β -cell destruction is autoimmune in nature, where the body's immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing β -cells in the pancreas. This leads to an absolute insulin deficiency, resulting in uncontrolled hyperglycemia (JC n.d.).

Role of Glucagon, Insulin, and Metabolic Abnormalities

The regulation of glucose homeostasis is primarily controlled by two hormones: insulin and glucagon. Insulin, secreted by pancreatic β -cells, promotes the uptake of glucose by tissues, particularly muscle and adipose, and facilitates its storage as glycogen in the liver. In contrast, glucagon, produced by α -cells of the pancreas, raises blood glucose levels by promoting the release of glucose from the liver (glycogenolysis) and stimulating the production of new glucose (gluconeogenesis) (Department of Health and Human Services. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention 2011).

In diabetes, this balance is disrupted. In Type 2 diabetes, insulin resistance results in reduced glucose uptake and storage, while glucagon secretion is often abnormally elevated. This unopposed glucagon action exacerbates hyperglycemia by increasing hepatic glucose output. Additionally, hyperinsulinemia (elevated insulin levels) occurs early in the disease, as the body attempts to compensate for insulin resistance.

Metabolic abnormalities in diabetes extend beyond glucose dysregulation. Dyslipidemia, characterized by elevated levels of triglycerides and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, along with decreased levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, is common in Type 2 diabetes. Additionally, increased free fatty acids and adipokines (molecules secreted by adipose tissue) contribute to insulin resistance and inflammation. These metabolic abnormalities contribute to the development of cardiovascular diseases and other complications often seen in diabetic patients.

Inflammatory Pathways and Endothelial Dysfunction

Chronic low-grade inflammation plays a significant role in the pathophysiology of diabetes. Elevated levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF- α , interleukin-6 (IL-6), and C-reactive protein (CRP) have been observed in individuals with Type 2 diabetes. These inflammatory markers are believed to interfere with insulin signaling pathways, further promoting insulin resistance. Inflammation also contributes to endothelial dysfunction, a key factor in the development of diabetic complications such as atherosclerosis and cardiovascular diseases.

Impaired Insulin Secretion and β -cell Death

In addition to insulin resistance, β -cell dysfunction is a hallmark of both types of diabetes, but it is especially prominent in Type 2 diabetes. Over time, β -cells become progressively impaired and may even undergo apoptosis (programmed cell death). This is partly due to glucotoxicity, where elevated glucose levels induce β -cell stress, leading to reduced insulin secretion and eventual β -cell failure. The combination of insulin resistance and insufficient insulin secretion creates a vicious cycle, where elevated glucose levels further exacerbate β -cell dysfunction, leading to worsening hyperglycemia. (Wild S 2004).

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF DIABETES

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by persistent hyperglycemia due to defects in insulin secretion, insulin action, or both. The disease primarily manifests in two major forms: Type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1DM) and Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM), each with distinct pathophysiological mechanisms.

- **Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus (T1DM):**

T1DM is an autoimmune disease that leads to the destruction of pancreatic β -cells in the islets of Langerhans, resulting in absolute insulin deficiency. This autoimmune process is often initiated by environmental triggers (e.g., viral infections) in genetically predisposed individuals. The autoimmune response involves autoreactive T-cells, autoantibodies (such as anti-GAD, anti-IA2), and cytokine-mediated apoptosis of β -cells.

Insulin deficiency leads to decreased glucose uptake by tissues, increased gluconeogenesis, glycogenolysis, and lipolysis—culminating in hyperglycemia, ketogenesis, and potentially diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA).

The destruction of β -cells typically progresses over months or years before hyperglycemia becomes clinically apparent. (Boney CM 2005)

- **Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM):**

T2DM results from a combination of insulin resistance and relative insulin deficiency. It is primarily associated with obesity, physical inactivity, and genetic predisposition.

Insulin resistance occurs in muscle, liver, and adipose tissues. In muscles, glucose uptake is impaired; in the liver, unchecked gluconeogenesis occurs; in adipose tissue, increased lipolysis leads to elevated free fatty acids (FFAs), which further exacerbate insulin resistance. (Leonardo Jacob S 1987).

Initially, the pancreatic β -cells compensate by increasing insulin secretion. Over time, β -cell dysfunction ensues, characterized by impaired insulin synthesis and secretion, possibly due to glucotoxicity, lipotoxicity, oxidative stress, and amyloid deposition.

As insulin secretion fails to compensate for resistance, chronic hyperglycemia develops. (KD 2013) (L. A. Wassmuth R 1989).

- **Common Pathophysiological Features in Both Types:**

- **Glucotoxicity:** Chronic hyperglycemia impairs β -cell function and insulin action.
- **Lipotoxicity:** Elevated FFAs lead to β -cell dysfunction and apoptosis.
- **Inflammation and oxidative stress:** These contribute to β -cell death and insulin resistance.
- **Altered incretin effect:** In T2DM, there is reduced secretion and function of incretins like GLP-1 and GIP, which impair insulin release postprandially.

RISK FACTORS AND CAUSES

The development of diabetes mellitus is influenced by a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. These risk factors differ slightly between Type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1DM) and Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM), although there may be some overlap ("Standards of Medical Care, in Diabetes 2024).

- **Risk Factors and Causes of Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus (T1DM)**

T1DM is primarily an autoimmune disorder with both genetic and environmental triggers.

- **Genetic Susceptibility:** Certain HLA (human leukocyte antigen) genotypes, especially HLA-DR3 and HLA-DR4, are strongly associated with increased risk of T1DM.
- **Family History:** Having a first-degree relative with T1DM increases the risk.
- **Environmental Triggers:** Viral infections (e.g., enteroviruses), early exposure to cow's milk, and low vitamin D levels have been implicated in initiating the autoimmune process.
- **Autoantibodies:** The presence of islet cell autoantibodies (GAD, IA-2, ZnT8) is a key marker of autoimmunity.

- **Risk Factors and Causes of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM)**

T2DM is a multifactorial disease predominantly influenced by modifiable lifestyle and metabolic risk factors, along with genetic predisposition. (Hu 2011).

- **Obesity and Overweight:** Central (abdominal) obesity is the most significant risk factor. Excess adipose tissue contributes to insulin resistance through the secretion of inflammatory cytokines and FFAs. (Kahn 2006).
- **Physical Inactivity:** Sedentary behavior decreases insulin sensitivity and contributes to weight gain.
- **Unhealthy Diet:** High intake of processed foods, saturated fats, and sugary beverages increases diabetes risk.
- **Family History:** A strong familial tendency exists, suggesting a genetic component.
- **Age:** The risk increases with age, particularly after 45 years.
- **Ethnicity:** Higher prevalence among South Asians, African Americans, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American populations.

- **Hypertension and Dyslipidemia:** These metabolic conditions are closely associated with insulin resistance and T2DM.
- **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS):** Women with PCOS are at higher risk due to associated insulin resistance.
- **Gestational Diabetes History:** Women with prior gestational diabetes have a higher risk of developing T2DM later in life.¹

CLASSIFICATION

- **Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus (T1DM):**

An autoimmune destruction of β -cells, usually leading to absolute insulin deficiency. It is often diagnosed in children or adolescents but can occur at any age. (Blood A 1975) (E. G. Atkinson MA 2014)

- **Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM):**

Characterized by insulin resistance and relative insulin deficiency. It is the most prevalent form and primarily affects adults, though increasing in younger populations due to obesity. (Dyck PJ 1993)(Khan 2023)

- **Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM):**

Hyperglycemia first recognized during pregnancy. Although it typically resolves after childbirth, it increases the mother's risk of developing T2DM later in life. (Metzger 2008)

- **Other Specific Types (Monogenic and Secondary Diabetes) These include:**

- **Maturity-Onset Diabetes of the Young (MODY):** A group of monogenic forms of diabetes due to genetic mutations affecting insulin production.
- **Pancreatogenic Diabetes:** Secondary to pancreatic disorders (e.g., pancreatitis, cystic fibrosis).
- **Drug or Chemical-Induced Diabetes:** Caused by medications such as glucocorticoids, thiazides, or antipsychotics (Verge CF 1996).

COMPLICATIONS OF DIABETES

Diabetes mellitus, if inadequately managed, can lead to a wide range of complications that significantly affect patient health and quality of life. These complications are generally classified into acute and chronic types. Acute complications include diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA), hyperosmolar hyperglycemic state (HHS), and hypoglycemia. DKA, more common in type 1 diabetes, is

characterized by severe insulin deficiency leading to hyperglycemia, ketosis, metabolic acidosis, and dehydration, while HHS occurs mainly in type 2 diabetes and presents with profound hyperglycemia, dehydration, and altered consciousness, without significant ketosis. Hypoglycemia, often resulting from excessive insulin administration or missed meals, presents with symptoms such as confusion, sweating, palpitations, and in severe cases, seizures or coma. Chronic complications are divided into microvascular and macrovascular categories. Microvascular complications include diabetic retinopathy, nephropathy, and neuropathy. Diabetic retinopathy progresses from non-proliferative to proliferative stages and may involve macular edema, potentially leading to blindness. Diabetic nephropathy is characterized by persistent albuminuria and may progress to end-stage renal disease, while diabetic neuropathy affects peripheral and autonomic nerves, leading to pain, sensory loss, and autonomic dysfunction. Macrovascular complications, primarily due to accelerated atherosclerosis, include cardiovascular disease (e.g., myocardial infarction and heart failure), cerebrovascular disease (e.g., ischemic stroke), and peripheral artery disease (PAD), which increases the risk of limb ischemia, ulcers, and amputations. Effective glycemic control, regular screening, and early intervention are essential to prevent or delay the onset of these complications and reduce the long-term burden of diabetes (Bastaki 2005).

CURRENT TREATMENT STRATEGIES

The treatment of diabetes mellitus focuses on achieving and maintaining optimal blood glucose control to prevent complications. The management strategy is individualized, with the goal of achieving glycemic targets, addressing comorbid conditions, and improving quality of life. For Type 1 diabetes, the cornerstone of treatment is insulin therapy, as patients have absolute insulin deficiency. Insulin can be administered through multiple daily injections or insulin pumps, with various formulations (rapid-acting, long-acting) to mimic normal physiological insulin secretion. In Type 2 diabetes, lifestyle modification—especially dietary changes and increased physical activity—is the first-line intervention. Pharmacological treatment is initiated if blood glucose targets are not met, with oral agents like metformin (a biguanide) being the first-line drug. Metformin works by improving insulin sensitivity and

reducing hepatic glucose production. If additional control is needed, sulfonylureas, DPP-4 inhibitors, SGLT2 inhibitors, GLP-1 receptor agonists, and thiazolidinediones may be used, depending on patient characteristics. Insulin therapy may also be required in the later stages of Type 2 diabetes as insulin resistance and β -cell dysfunction worsen. SGLT2 inhibitors (such as empagliflozin) and GLP-1 receptor agonists (like liraglutide) are increasingly favored due to their beneficial effects on weight loss, blood pressure, and cardiovascular risk reduction. Incretin-based therapies, such as GLP-1 agonists and DPP-4 inhibitors, have gained popularity for their glucose-lowering effects and cardiovascular benefits (Henry 1993). Dual or combination therapy is commonly employed to achieve optimal blood glucose levels. For gestational diabetes, management primarily includes dietary modifications and exercise, with insulin therapy being used if blood glucose control is inadequate. Additionally, patients with diabetes are monitored for comorbidities such as hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and obesity, with appropriate treatments such as antihypertensive medications (e.g., ACE inhibitors, ARBs) and statins for cardiovascular protection. Comprehensive care also includes regular screening for complications, including retinal exams, renal function tests, and neuropathy assessments. Patient education, continuous monitoring of blood glucose levels, and the use of technology (e.g., continuous glucose monitors) are critical for managing diabetes and reducing the risk of complications (Int J Diabetes & Metabolism 1989) (Modak 2007).

ROLE OF LIFESTYLE AND BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS

Lifestyle and behavioral interventions play a pivotal role in the management and prevention of diabetes mellitus, particularly Type 2 diabetes, and in the overall well-being of individuals with Type 1 diabetes. These interventions focus on dietary modifications, physical activity, and behavioral changes, which collectively help to control blood glucose levels, reduce insulin resistance, and prevent complications. The cornerstone of diabetes management is weight management, with even modest weight loss (5-10% of body weight) significantly improving insulin sensitivity and glycemic control. (Organization 2006) Dietary interventions emphasize a balanced, nutrient-dense diet, with a focus on low-glycemic index foods, whole grains, lean proteins, healthy fats, and an

increased intake of fruits and vegetables. Carbohydrate counting and portion control are critical components, especially for Type 1 diabetes, to help patients align insulin administration with food intake. Physical activity is another cornerstone of diabetes management, as regular exercise improves glucose uptake by muscles, reduces body fat, enhances insulin sensitivity, and promotes cardiovascular health. Both aerobic exercises (e.g., walking, cycling) and resistance training (e.g., weight lifting) are recommended, with at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week. In addition to these physical interventions, behavioral strategies such as self-monitoring of blood glucose, stress management, sleep improvement, and psychosocial support are essential in achieving long-term adherence to lifestyle changes (Vijan 2010). Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing, and patient education programs can help individuals overcome barriers to lifestyle changes, cope with the emotional burden of diabetes, and improve self-efficacy. Multidisciplinary care, involving dietitians, exercise physiologists, and behavioral therapists, is often essential for supporting lifestyle changes, particularly in high-risk populations such as those with pre-diabetes or gestational diabetes. Evidence consistently demonstrates that comprehensive lifestyle interventions not only delay the progression from pre-diabetes to diabetes but also reduce complications in individuals already diagnosed with diabetes, leading to improved long-term outcomes and enhanced quality of life (Nathan DM 2005).

ADVANCES IN DIABETES MANAGEMENT

Recent advances in diabetes management have significantly improved the precision, efficiency, and safety of treatment, offering new hope for individuals living with both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. One of the most significant breakthroughs has been the development of continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) systems, which provide real-time glucose readings throughout the day and night. (Rebecca et al., 2009). These devices help patients and healthcare providers make timely adjustments to insulin therapy, minimizing the risk of both hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia. Insulin pumps have also advanced, with newer models featuring closed-loop systems that automatically adjust insulin delivery based on real-time glucose data, mimicking the function of a healthy pancreas. Additionally, the

development of insulin analogs—such as ultra-rapid-acting and long-acting formulations—has allowed for better glycemic control with fewer fluctuations in blood glucose levels. (MN n.d.) Another promising development in diabetes treatment is the use of glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists such as liraglutide and semaglutide, which enhance insulin secretion, suppress glucagon release, and slow gastric emptying. These drugs not only improve blood glucose control but also offer additional benefits, such as weight loss and a reduction in cardiovascular risk. Similarly, sodium-glucose co-transporter 2 (SGLT2) inhibitors like empagliflozin and canagliflozin have revolutionized the management of Type 2 diabetes by increasing glucose excretion via the kidneys, and they have been shown to reduce cardiovascular events and kidney disease progression (LT, New technologies and therapies in the management of diabetes. 2007). The use of dual and combination therapies has become increasingly common, combining drugs from different classes to target multiple pathways involved in diabetes pathophysiology, optimizing treatment outcomes, and minimizing side effects. Beyond pharmacological innovations, artificial pancreas systems and stem cell therapies are on the horizon, aiming to provide more sustainable, long-term solutions for Type 1 diabetes, potentially eliminating the need for daily insulin injections (JM. 2006). Additionally, digital health technologies, such as mobile apps and telemedicine platforms, are improving patient engagement, allowing for remote monitoring, personalized education, and enhanced communication between patients and healthcare providers. These advancements, combined with a growing understanding of the molecular mechanisms underlying diabetes, hold the promise of more effective and individualized treatment strategies in the future (SE 2002) (LT, New technologies and therapies in the management of diabetes 2007).

FUTURE PROSPECTS AND RESEARCH GAPS

As diabetes mellitus continues to be a global health challenge, ongoing research and emerging technologies are paving the way for more effective, personalized treatments and preventive strategies. (Gloyn AL 2018) Future prospects in diabetes management are focused on advancing precision medicine, where therapies are tailored based on genetic, environmental, and lifestyle

factors, allowing for more individualized and effective treatment regimens. The development of artificial pancreas systems, combining continuous glucose monitoring with automated insulin delivery, shows promise in providing tight glycemic control without the need for frequent manual interventions. Furthermore, the role of stem cell therapy in regenerating pancreatic β -cells offers hope for the potential reversal of Type 1 diabetes, although this remains an area of intensive research. Gene therapy and immunotherapy are also being explored as possible treatments for Type 1 diabetes, with the aim of modifying the immune response that leads to β -cell destruction. Nanotechnology, including nanoparticle-based drug delivery systems, could enhance the targeted delivery of insulin and other therapeutic agents, improving efficacy and reducing side effects (Eizirik DL 2020).

In Type 2 diabetes, there is a growing emphasis on the microbiome's role in glucose regulation, with evidence suggesting that gut bacteria influence insulin resistance and inflammation (Chakravar A 2017). Research into probiotics and prebiotics is expanding, potentially offering new avenues for managing diabetes through dietary interventions that modulate the microbiome. Moreover, as the cardiovascular and renal complications of diabetes remain leading causes of morbidity and mortality, more focused research on cardioprotective therapies and renal protective agents is crucial. The ongoing development of SGLT2 inhibitors and GLP-1 receptor agonists that demonstrate additional benefits beyond glucose control, such as cardiovascular and renal protection, highlights the importance of targeting multimodal pathways in diabetes treatment.

However, several research gaps remain that must be addressed to further improve outcomes in diabetes management. A significant gap exists in understanding the long-term safety and efficacy of newer therapies, particularly as many of these treatments have only been studied over short to medium time frames. There is also a need for greater exploration into the genetic and epigenetic factors that contribute to diabetes onset and progression, as well as the role of environmental factors in diabetes development. Additionally, while there has been a push toward digital health tools, further research is required to assess their impact on long-term patient outcomes and the cost-effectiveness of integrating these tools into routine care. Another area in need of investigation is the

effectiveness of lifestyle interventions in diverse populations, particularly those from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups, to ensure equity in diabetes care. Ultimately, while considerable advancements have been made, addressing these research gaps will be crucial for developing innovative solutions that can reduce the global burden of diabetes and improve patient quality of life.

II. CONCLUSION

Diabetes mellitus remains a significant global health challenge, affecting millions worldwide. While advances in understanding its pathophysiology and the development of effective treatments have improved patient outcomes, there are still substantial challenges. Current therapies, such as insulin therapy, GLP-1 receptor agonists, and SGLT2 inhibitors, offer improved glycemic control and reduce complications. However, personalized treatment approaches are needed to better address individual patient needs. Emerging technologies, including continuous glucose monitoring and artificial pancreas systems, along with advancements in digital health tools, hold promise for transforming diabetes care. Additionally, ongoing research into stem cell therapies, genetics, and the microbiome could lead to more targeted treatments and even potential cures. Despite these advancements, gaps remain in understanding the genetic, environmental, and metabolic factors contributing to diabetes. Continued research, innovation, and integrated care strategies are essential to reducing the global burden of diabetes and improving quality of life for patients.

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