



Report

Diabetes in Young Adults: A Wake-Up Call for Organizations



The number of individuals living with type 2 diabetes and prediabetes is rising, yet the average age of onset is declining. Here's why that is concerning, and what organizations can do to combat this chronic disease epidemic.

The number of people with diabetes today is higher than it has been before — and it's not just the older generation who is at risk. People are developing diabetes at younger ages and higher rates. In fact, 1 in 4 Americans ages 18–34 are living with prediabetes, putting them at heightened risk for lifelong chronic conditions.¹

Now, organizations are tasked with mitigating risk across their population. And if they don't act soon, they run the risk of facing astronomical costs for years to come.



Health Is Not Guaranteed in Our Youth

Age is a significant risk factor for type 2 diabetes, with older adults at a greater risk of developing the condition. However, while young adults are diagnosed with diabetes at a lower rate, they are at an even greater risk for experiencing the harmful consequences of diabetes than older adults. A 2019 article published by the American Heart Association found that patients diagnosed with type 2 diabetes at 40 years old or younger had the highest excess risk for all outcomes analyzed, including cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, acute myocardial infarction, stroke, and heart failure.² These individuals were also at the greatest risk of loss of life-years, with the highest excess risk for total mortality, cardiovascular-related mortality, and non-cardiovascular mortality.³

These findings are consistent with other literature on the subject. A 2016 study published by the American Diabetes Association compared individuals diagnosed with type 2 diabetes between the ages of 15 and 30 to those diagnosed between 40 and 50 years of age. This study reports that “an inverse relationship between age of diabetes onset and standardized mortality ratio was seen, which was the highest for those diagnosed with type 2 diabetes between the ages of 15 and 30”.³ In fact, a threefold increase in standardized mortality ratio was seen among the youngest-onset group compared with the general population, where the older-diabetes-onset group trended towards a negligible effect on mortality above the general population. The study found that younger-onset patients have “a greater risk of renal and nerve complications” compared to the older-onset patients.³ Despite the greater risk observed among the younger-onset group, the study found that these individuals had a lower rate of treatment for hypertension and high cholesterol, suggesting that the younger-onset population experiences health risks associated with their type 2 diabetes for a longer period of time, and receive treatment for these risks less frequently. Ultimately, the study concludes that “duration of diabetes is one of the strongest determinants of complication risk.”³

The True Impact of Diabetes:

37.3 million U.S. adults are living with diabetes

1 in 5 diabetics aren't aware of their condition

1 in 3 U.S. adults have prediabetes, putting them at high risk for type 2 diabetes

1 in 4 young adults in the U.S. (ages 18-34) are prediabetic

8th leading cause of death in the U.S.

#1 cause of kidney failure, lower-limb amputations, and adult blindness

Diabetes is Costing Us Billions:

\$327 billion annual cost of diabetes in the U.S.

2.3x greater healthcare costs for U.S. adults with diabetes

\$3.3 billion lost to diabetes-related absenteeism

\$26.9 billion in lost productivity

\$37.5 billion lost to diabetes-related worker disability

\$1 out of every \$4 in US healthcare costs is spent on caring for people with diabetes

Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/basics/diabetes.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/data/statistics-report/index.html>
<https://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/early/2018/03/20/dci18-0007>

Understanding A1C Levels Across Virgin Pulse Member Populations

1 in 4 Virgin Pulse members have A1C levels that are indicative of either prediabetes or diabetes. 9% of young adults aged 18–39 within the Virgin Pulse member base report validated A1C levels that fall into such a range. In order to understand how to best support these individuals, it is essential to first understand their lifestyles and associated comorbidities. To do so, health risk assessment results were analyzed. The results allow us to determine a more complete picture of the lifestyle of young adults with at-risk A1C levels among the Virgin Pulse population.

Virgin Pulse members between ages 18–39 with at-risk A1C levels consume more unhealthy fat and more processed foods than those with normal A1C levels. Similarly, members with normal A1C levels report approximately 50 minutes more of activity than those with at risk A1C levels. At-risk members also have a notably higher rate of additional existing health conditions. In fact, these members were 28% more likely to have an additional condition, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, arthritis, physical disability, back/spine disability, or depression. This greater risk is especially concerning, considering the well reported pattern of young adults receiving treatment for their comorbidities at lower rates than older adults.³

An Overview of A1C:

A1C is a simple blood test that can detect risk or presence of type 2 diabetes by capturing your average blood sugar levels over the course of several months. Individuals suffering from type 2 diabetes or prediabetes can also use the A1C test to monitor their blood sugar response to treatment. So, what numbers should you look out for?

- A normal A1C level is below 5.7%
- Prediabetes is indicated by an A1C level between 5.7% to 6.4%
- An A1C level of 6.5% or more indicates diabetes



Source for A1C Overview: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/managing/managing-blood-sugar/a1c.html>

What Can Be Done?

Given the high costs and life-altering health risks associated with diabetes, it is no surprise that companies around the country are eager to develop programs that will help to reverse prediabetes or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes.

Such concerns are especially significant for the young adult population with prediabetes. These individuals are at a great risk of experiencing significant health risks if they do not successfully reverse their prediabetes status. A study published in Critical Diabetes and Endocrinology found that 1 in 4 people with prediabetes will progress to Type 2 diabetes within 3–5 years, and 3 in 4 will make that transition during their lifetime.⁴ For these young adults, many of whom participate in the American workforce, a research-based, accessible [diabetes prevention program](#) is the key to their success.

According to the CDC, year-long, structured lifestyle change intervention reduced the incidence of diabetes by 58% among adults with prediabetes.⁵ Digital therapeutics are most the effective approach to not only prevent type 2 diabetes, but also manage, treat, and even reverse diabetes.

The most effective digital therapeutics are:



Targeted

having the ability to identify those at high risk for chronic conditions—and, as a result, high healthcare costs—to improve clinical endpoints in weight, blood pressure, and physical activity. Using risk stratification to determine eligibility for these clinically-validated, evidence-based solutions will yield the greatest return-on-investment for these individuals and their organizations.



Connected

to the individual's overall health journey as part of a unified, personalized wellbeing engagement solution. Digital therapeutics aim to not only reduce the risk of one specific chronic disease, but also influence the risk of comorbidities like heart disease, cancer, anxiety and depression, and COVID mortality. When deeply integrated within a data-driven digital health platform, the likelihood of multi-dimensional health improvements increases.





Configurable

to accommodate the specifications set forth by organizations and users. A digital therapeutic solution that can be plugged into an existing sponsor solution will maximize uptake, engagement, and impact.



Personalized

to meet the unique needs and preferences of each individual. No two people are on the same health journey; therefore, each digital therapeutic experience must be tailorable to address individual areas of risk. A solution that digests 360° clinical views of member profiles and outputs relevant and actionable insights will help individuals discover meaningful tools that effectively and efficiently improve health outcomes.



Results-driven

demonstrating meaningful improvements in biometrics, gaps in care, engagement, and medication adherence. By empowering high-risk individuals to take charge of their health journey and establish life-long healthy habits through small daily actions, digital therapeutics help to reduce risk, delay onset, or reverse type 2 diabetes.



At Virgin Pulse, our simplified, unified Homebase for Health® makes it easy for people of any age to understand their unique wellbeing needs and take ownership of their health journey. The VP Transform collection of digital therapeutics—including our evidence-based, CDC-recognized diabetes prevention program—is integrated within our dynamic digital wellbeing ecosystem to create a fully connected health experience.

VP Transform for Prediabetes is tailored to those at risk of developing type 2 diabetes. With connected smart devices, behavior tracking tools, and high-touch coaching and peer support, VP Transform strikes a balance between technology and human connection. Users feel empowered to take an active role in their health through a 12-month behavior change program, reducing the risk of complications and lowering costs associated with diabetes.

The VP Transform

Like most chronic conditions, healthy lifestyle habits can prevent or delay disease—especially in populations that can easily be overlooked, such as early and mid-stage professionals. The onset of type 2 diabetes is not dependent on age, but neither is prevention. Encouraging and enabling all generations, from baby boomers to Gen Z, to practice healthy habits each day is key to the prevention and management of this costly and dangerous chronic disease.

Ready to expand your Homebase for Health® and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes with VP Transform? [Request a demo today.](#)

Learn more at virginpulse.com Find us on [facebook](#) | [twitter](#) | [linkedin](#)

Sources

1 <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p1202-diabetes.html>

2 <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.118.037885>

3 <https://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/39/5/823>

4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6507173/>

5 <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention/help-prevent-type2.htm>



9 in 10

participants enjoy their VP Transform program experience.



51%

more effective than industry standard weight loss outcomes, according to the American Diabetes Association (ADA).



10–30%

lower price point when compared to other digital therapeutic solutions.



Recognized by the CDC as top-performing diabetes prevention program with optimal outcomes year after year.