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di·a·be·tes  (dī'ə-bē tīs, -tēz)

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n.

1. Any of a group of diseases characterized by high blood sugar levels caused by insufficient production of insulin, impaired response to insulin, or both, especially:

- a. Type 1 diabetes.
 - b. Type 2 diabetes.
 - c. Gestational diabetes. In all subsenses also called *diabetes mellitus*.
2. See [diabetes insipidus](#).

[Middle English *diabete*, from Medieval Latin *diabētēs*, from Greek, compass, siphon, diabetes, from *diabainein*, *diabē-*, to stride or stand with legs apart, cross over, straddle : *dia-*, *dia-* + *bainein*, to go; see **g^Wā-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

Word History: Ancient Greek physicians gave the name *diabētēs* to a chronic disease characterized by excessive urination—probably what we now know as diabetes insipidus. (Later, the name was also used for a different disease, diabetes mellitus, in which increased urination is a common symptom.) The term is ultimately derived from the verb *diabainein*, "to stride or stand with the legs apart, step across, pass over," but it is not certain how *diabētēs* came to describe the disease. *Diabētēs* has a variety of other meanings in Greek, including "compass" (since a compass can be likened to a person striding with the legs spread wide) and "siphon" (perhaps because a siphon straddles—so to speak—two containers and permits the passage of liquid from one to the other). The first known use of *diabētēs* as a designation for a disease is found in the works of Aretaeus of Cappadocia, who probably lived in the first century AD. Aretaeus's works became standard medical texts of the ancient and medieval world. One chapter of his work *On the Causes and Signs of Chronic Diseases* is devoted to a condition he calls *diabētēs*. Aretaeus, however, was not the first physician to give the condition this name, for he offers his own thoughts on the etymology of the term: "The disease seems to me to have acquired the name *diabētēs*, as if from the Greek word for siphon (*diabētēs*), because the fluid does not remain in the body." Some modern scholars, on the other hand, have suggested that as a medical term, *diabētēs* originally made reference to the straddling stance taken during urination by those with the disease—the intended meaning may have been "one standing with the legs planted firmly apart." Whatever its origin, *diabētēs* became the standard name for the disease in Greek and medieval medical Latin. *Diabetes* is first attested in English around 1425 in the spelling *diabete*, found in a Middle English translation of a Latin medical text by the French physician Guy de Chauliac (ca. 1300-1368): *Auicen forsoþ in diabete graunteþ water of whey of shepis mylke*. "In the case of diabetes, Avicenna forsooth gives water of the whey of sheep's milk."

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

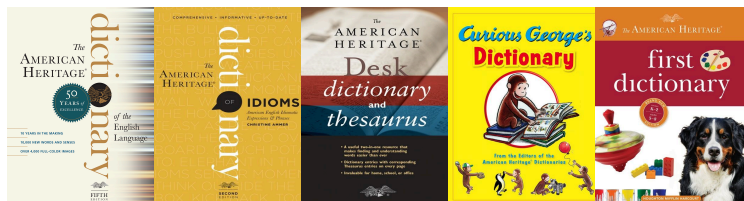
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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