
Diabetes

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition which occurs when there is too much glucose (sugar) in the blood. The food we eat is mostly changed into glucose and passed into the bloodstream. From there it travels to other parts of the body to give us energy. To get this energy the glucose has to be helped out of the bloodstream and into the body's cells by a hormone called insulin. Insulin is produced in your body by an organ called the pancreas.

Diabetes causes glucose to build up in your bloodstream because it cannot enter the body's cells and the cells in your body don't get the energy they need.

Types of Diabetes

There are two types of diabetes. People who get diabetes at a very early age usually have Type 1 diabetes. These people cannot produce any insulin and need daily injections of insulin.

The more common form of diabetes is Type 2 diabetes or late onset diabetes. It typically develops in people later in life, especially in people over 40 years of age who are overweight and/or have a family history of diabetes. However it can occur in people under 40. When you have Type 2 diabetes, either your pancreas isn't producing enough insulin or the insulin is not working properly.

Symptoms for Type 2 Diabetes

- Feeling thirsty all the time.
- Passing large amounts of urine and often.
- Tiredness, weakness and weight loss.
- Slow healing and recurring skin infections.
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet.
- Blurred or hazy vision.

Glucose levels can creep up slowly over a long period, but you may not necessarily experience the symptoms of diabetes unless your blood glucose level is very high. Early detection by a blood glucose test may prevent damage to the blood vessels in your heart, eyes and kidneys and prevent poor circulation in your feet. If you experience any of these symptoms see your doctor for a blood glucose test.

Treatment for Type 2 Diabetes

Diabetes cannot be cured but serious long-term complications are less likely to occur if you manage your diabetes.

Lose weight: if you are overweight as this will help improve your blood glucose level. Losing weight is the most important way for overweight people to control their diabetes. Regular exercise will help to reduce your weight and it also uses up any extra glucose in your bloodstream.

Eat healthy food: You don't need special diet foods. Eat foods high in complex carbohydrates and low in saturated fat and salt. Talk to a dietitian who can explain more about the type of foods to eat and provide examples of recipes suitable for diabetics.

Eat regular meals: To help keep blood glucose levels within the normal range.

Give up smoking: Smoking narrows the blood vessels, which increases the risk of circulation problems such as heart attacks, strokes and leg ulcers.

Take your medicines at the same time every day: People with Type 2 diabetes may be taking tablets or using insulin injections.

Keep your blood glucose level as close to normal as possible: Balance your food, exercise and medicines. Some people will be able to control their diabetes with healthy eating and exercise. Others will need to take medicines.

Extra Care

Eyes: Damage to the blood vessels at the back of the eye can cause blindness. Have your eyes checked by a specialist as advised by your doctor

Heart: Damage to the heart vessels can cause heart attacks. Reduce fat in your diet, control your weight, exercise regularly and don't smoke.

Kidneys: Diabetes can damage the small blood vessels in your kidneys. High blood pressure can also damage your kidneys. Keep good control of your blood glucose and have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Diabetes can cause damage to the nerves and blood vessels leading to further complications.

Feet: Damage to the nerves and blood vessels in the feet can cause a loss of feeling and poor blood supply. Check your feet every day for cuts or cracks. Regular exercise will help with the circulation in your feet.

Hypoglycaemia

Insulin or tablets may drop your blood glucose too low if you are late for a meal; exercise more than usual; drink alcohol without food; take too much insulin or too many tablets; or if your body starts to need a lower dose. This is called hypoglycaemia or low blood glucose.

Symptoms can occur quickly. You may feel weak, lightheaded, have double vision, pale sweaty skin and feel confused, clumsy or anxious. If left untreated the person can become unconscious.

Always carry glucose tablets and take these when you get become hypoglycaemic. If you don't have any take something sweet like jam, honey or a soft drink. If the person is unconscious honey can be placed under the tongue.

Illnesses

Illnesses like colds, flu, vomiting and diarrhoea can cause your blood glucose level to rise. Extra care needs to be taken and you may require more insulin than normal.

Where to go for Support

Diabetes New Zealand Inc.

Diabetes New Zealand Inc. is a nation-wide non-government non-profit organisation. They provide support for members, member societies and health professionals involved with diabetes. They aim to increase the general public's awareness of diabetes so the incidence of undiagnosed diabetes is reduced. They also support all people with diabetes in their day to day management and control and support research in the treatment, prevention and cure of diabetes.

For more information phone 0800 DIABETES or 0800 342 238

Diabetes Society Christchurch Inc.

Diabetes Christchurch operates a Drop in Centre, which is open 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday. They provide support for people with diabetes, community awareness, advocacy and a quarterly newsletter. Membership is free for the first year.

For more information phone 03 379 5121

Caring for Carers

Joining a carer support group can relieve some of the stress you are under as a carer. The constant tasks, the concerns, grief, drama, moments of joy, frustration and exhaustion are all part of the day to day existence of a carer.

As a carer, it is important to remember that you are an individual with needs of your own. Ensure that you take care of yourself by arranging your day so that you have some time for yourself. Meeting with other carers can also ease the loneliness that carers can often experience.

Caring for Carers has a Newsletter and several support meetings each month and ongoing telephone support. These services are provided to help make your job easier.

Caring for Carers is situated:

4th floor, Securities House
221 Gloucester Street, Christchurch.
Postal address: P O Box 13 167, Christchurch
Phone: 377 8426
Fax: 377 8420
Email: caringforcarers@xtra.co.nz