



What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic disease in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal because the body does not produce enough insulin and often it cannot use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone needed for glucose to enter the cells and be converted to energy.

Why is Diabetes Serious?

- Diabetes affects 1.2 million Australians and currently there is no cure.
- Diabetes can cause serious complications including blindness, limb amputation, heart disease, kidney disease, stroke and erectile dysfunction.
- Limb amputees are fifteen times more likely to be people with diabetes.
- Retinopathy affects one in four people with diabetes and is the most common form of blindness in people under 60.
- People with diabetes are two to four times more likely to develop cardiovascular disease. In 1999-2000 12 percent of people with diabetes over the age of 25 years had a heart attack and 9 per cent had a stroke
- Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure. People with diabetes develop kidney disease at four times the rate of those who do not.
- If unmanaged, diabetes can potentially take more than 15 years off a person's life expectancy.

What are the symptoms of diabetes?

Symptoms for type 1 diabetes can include excessive thirst and urination, unexplained weight loss, weakness and fatigue, irritability, muscle cramps, blurred vision, skin infections, slow wound healing, and in some cases, tingling and numbness in the feet.

Symptoms for type 2 diabetes are similar to those for type 1 diabetes. Some people with type 2 do not have any symptoms at all. For others the first indication may be a complication of diabetes such as heart attack, vision problems, or a foot ulcer.

Can diabetes be prevented?

Type 2 diabetes can be delayed through lifestyle changes.

A number of landmark studies in the United States, Finland and China have shown that achieving a modest weight loss of up to 7 per cent and increasing physical activity to at least 30 minutes most days of the week can significantly reduce the risk

of developing type 2 diabetes.

The studies showed people at risk of type 2 diabetes were able to reduce their risk by nearly 60 per cent. Most people who are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes are overweight or obese, so weight loss is an important first step.

In the case of type 1 diabetes, there is currently no cure.

Are some Australians more prone to diabetes than others?

- The prevalence of diabetes in some Aboriginal communities may be as high as 30 per cent. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males are over seven times more likely to die from diabetes as the underlying cause than non-Indigenous males. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females are over 14 times more likely to die from diabetes as the underlying cause than non-Indigenous females.
- While about 28 per cent of Australians were born overseas, about 35 per cent of overseas-born Australians had diabetes in 2001. Those born in the South Pacific - Islands, Southern Europe, Middle East, North Africa and Southern Asia were most affected.
- Males from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are about 30 per cent more likely to die from diabetes (as the underlying cause) than other males. Females from CALD backgrounds are 50 per cent more likely to die from diabetes as the underlying cause than other females.

Who is most at risk of diabetes?

People who have one or more of the following risk factors are at increased risk of type 2 diabetes and should visit their doctor for a fasting blood glucose test:

- People over 55 years of age
- People over 45 years of age who have immediate family members with type 2 diabetes
- People over 45 years of age with blood pressure
- People over 45 years of age who are overweight
- People over 35 years of age and from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
- People over 35 years of age and from Pacific Islander, Indian subcontinent or Chinese cultural background
- People who have impaired fasting glucose (IFG) or impaired glucose tolerance (IGT)
- People who have heart disease or have had a heart attack
- Women who have had gestational diabetes

- Women who have polycystic ovarian syndrome and are overweight.

Because the symptoms may not be recognised or noticed people need to know the risk factors so they can act to reduce their risk or be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

How can people better manage their diabetes?

People with diabetes need to work with a team of health care professionals, which includes their GP, diabetes educator and dietitian. They should also work closely with specialists for regular checks of eyes, feet, blood pressure, blood lipids and blood glucose levels.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can also help reduce the risk of developing the complications of diabetes. This means being physically active most days, maintaining a healthy weight, adopting healthy eating with fruit, vegetables and low fat foods and not smoking.

People with type 1 diabetes need insulin for the rest of their lives.

Some people with type 2 diabetes can manage with regular physical activity, healthy eating and loss of excess weight. Over time treatment may progress from lifestyle modification to tablets and/or insulin injections.

Diabetes is the epidemic of the 21st century with an estimated 1.2 million Australians having diabetes and an additional 1350 people including 350 Victorians diagnosed every week.

Resources and Links

Diabetes Australia:

www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Multilingual information:

www.multilingualdiabetes.org.au

Kidney Health Australia:

www.kidney.org.au

National Heart Foundation:

www.heartfoundation.com.au

Australian Podiatry Council:
www.apodc.com.au

Eyes On Diabetes:
www.eyesondiabetes.org.au

Nutrition Australia:
www.nutritionaustralia.com.au

Diabetes Counselling Online
<http://www.diabetescounselling.com.au/>

Diabetes Australia Victoria
www.dav.org.au

Phone: 1300 136 588



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