

Diabetes: Know the risks



Diabetes can have a major impact on your life, particularly if you develop complications that are associated with the disease. Here is some information so that you can learn more about diabetes.

Diabetes is a condition where there is too much glucose (a type of sugar) in the blood because the body is unable to use it properly. This is because the body's method of converting glucose to energy is not working as it should.

Diabetes is divided into two categories:

Type 1 diabetes is often referred to as 'juvenile diabetes' because it most commonly begins during childhood or adolescence. It is characterised by the destruction of the pancreatic cells that manufacture insulin. In type 1 diabetes, daily insulin injections are required for treatment.

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs later in life and is more common in people who are overweight, although it can also be brought on by other factors as there are cases of people who have it and are not overweight. In type 2 diabetes, the body still produces insulin but the cells are unable to recognise it, causing blood sugar levels to remain high. Treatment includes diet and exercise and in some cases, oral medication may be required.

Diabetes complications

Having either type 1 or type 2 diabetes can put you at increased risk of developing many complications; some of them life-threatening. This is because over time, high blood glucose levels can damage the body, in particular the blood vessels. Damage to the large blood vessels

can cause complications relating to the brain and heart resulting in heart disease (heart attack and angina), stroke, high cholesterol, and/or high blood pressure.

Damage to the small blood vessels can cause problems in the eyes, kidneys, feet, and other systems of the body that rely upon nerves resulting in:

- Reduced vision or blindness.
- Kidney damage which can result in kidney failure requiring dialysis or transplant.
- Pain and cramps in hands or feet.
- Peripheral vascular disease (gangrene of the toes and feet, requiring amputation).
- Foot problems such as non-healing ulcers, numb feet, and foot deformities.
- Gastrointestinal problems such as bloating, indigestion, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, and constipation.
- Bladder complications including infections.
- Erectile dysfunction (impotence) in men and vaginal dryness in women.

The good news is that research has shown that up to 60% of diabetes cases may be prevented, or delayed, simply by maintaining a healthy weight. Weight reduction and management is best achieved by exercising often and eating well, which means a low-fat, low-GI diet. If you are at risk of diabetes, make an appointment to speak to your doctor.