

The Jean Hailes *Foundation* for women's health

Fact sheet

Living with Type 2 Diabetes

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition in which there is too much glucose (sugar) in the blood. The rise in glucose occurs because the body can't make enough *insulin* or the insulin produced is not working properly, this is known as *insulin resistance*. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that moves glucose from the blood stream, into the cells of the body where it is used for energy.

Almost one million Australians have diagnosed diabetes – and it's estimated that another one million people have the condition but are unaware of it. Another two million Australians have the early signs of diabetes, known as *pre-diabetes*. In fact, almost one in four Australians aged 25 years and over has either diabetes or pre-diabetes, increasing their risk of serious complications like heart disease. This figure is mainly due to the rise in obesity and our less active lifestyles.

Types of diabetes:

There are four main types of diabetes, including type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, gestational diabetes and pre-diabetes. This fact sheet will focus on type 2 diabetes (See '*Gestational Diabetes*' and '*Pre-Diabetes and Women*' fact sheets for more information or go to Diabetes Australia at www.diabetesaustralia.com.au).

Type 2 diabetes (formerly called *non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus* or *mature-age onset diabetes*) is the most common form of diabetes (affecting 85-90 per cent of people with diabetes). It usually develops in adults over the age of 45 years, but it is becoming increasingly common at a younger age, even during adolescence. Type 2 diabetes often occurs in those who have a family history of diabetes and can be triggered by lifestyle factors, such as being inactive. It is also associated with high blood pressure, abnormal blood fats and extra weight around the waist. In people with type 2 diabetes the body becomes resistant to insulin and eventually cannot make enough insulin to overcome this and glucose levels rise.

Who is at risk of developing type 2 diabetes?

If any of the following apply to you, you may be at risk of developing type 2 diabetes:

- age - the risk increases as you get older
- a family history of type 2 diabetes
- being above your healthy weight range
- a waist circumference greater than 80cm for women
- gestational diabetes and/or have given birth to a baby weighing more than 4.5kgs
- polycystic ovary syndrome
- any of the following backgrounds: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islands, Pacific Islands, Indian subcontinent or Asian
- pre-diabetes
- high blood pressure and/or abnormal blood fats/cholesterol and/or a history of heart disease

Typical symptoms of well established undiagnosed or untreated type 2 diabetes:

- increased thirst
- tiredness
- frequent/excessive urination
- persistent infections, such as genital thrush
- skin rashes/itching

It is important that type 2 diabetes is diagnosed and treated early. Those at high risk of type 2 diabetes should have a blood test each year. In the early stages of diabetes, most people will not have any of the above symptoms and may be diagnosed during a routine blood test. Note: complications associated with type 2 diabetes may already be present, even if symptoms of diabetes have gone unnoticed.

Diabetes, if not well controlled, can cause damage to blood vessels and nerves which may lead to problems with the eyes, kidneys and feet and increase the risk of heart attacks/strokes. Screening for these conditions and monitoring/managing blood pressure and cholesterol levels are critical in the management of diabetes.

The Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health

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ACN 092 915 618

Type 2 diabetes and pregnancy

Type 2 diabetes is now more common in women of reproductive age, and it is important that women with diabetes are advised to prepare and plan for pregnancy. If you have type 2 diabetes you should discuss pregnancy with your diabetes health professionals before conception to help ensure that your diabetes is managed optimally throughout the pregnancy.

Poorly controlled diabetes during pregnancy brings significant risk to the mother and baby. However, if your health is good and your blood glucose levels are well controlled at conception and throughout the pregnancy, the risk of complications is significantly reduced.

Take action and manage your diabetes

Seek help from health professionals:

Diabetes is best managed by a team in partnership with yourself. It is important to see your general practitioner and work together to manage your condition and prevent complications. An accredited dietitian can help you develop a healthy eating plan and a diabetes educator can help you learn about diabetes and how to monitor and manage your condition. Services can sometimes be subsidised by Medicare, ask your general practitioner for more information.

Dietitians and diabetes educators can be found through your general practitioner or your local community health centre. A list of private dietitians can be found on the Dietitians Association of Australia website at www.daa.asn.au or by phoning 1800 812 942.

Manage your blood glucose levels:

The aim of type 2 diabetes treatment is to reduce the risk of diabetes complications and optimise your quality of life. This involves keeping your blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible. The basis of diabetes management is regular screening and prevention of complications, healthy eating, physical activity and medication if required.

Healthy eating plan and physical activity:

Diabetes increases your risk of cardiovascular disease (heart attacks and strokes); eating a healthy diet and making physical activity a part of your life is a great start to reducing that risk.

When adopting a healthy eating plan to lose weight, reduce your total energy intake (kilojoules) as well as your total fat intake. You can do this by eating plenty of vegetables and high fibre cereal products and using a minimum amount of fat and oils. Quick fix fad diets are unsustainable and should be avoided; focus on making small sustainable changes (e.g. changing to low fat dairy food and smaller portion sizes) (See *'Healthy Eating for You'* fact sheet for more information).

Be active every day in as many ways as you can, as regular physical activity helps your body use insulin better. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days (see *'Physical Activity'* fact sheet for more information). Make sure to consult your health practitioner before starting a physical activity plan.

"I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and diet controlled in 1994. I am still diet controlled. I have learnt to eat a healthy diet and to maintain my weight. Exercising has also been important to me. Diabetes does not control my lifestyle, I feel it has made me more aware of living a healthier lifestyle, and still enjoying life to the fullest." (Annie, 55)

Medication

Lifestyle is fundamental in diabetes management but as the condition progresses, it may be necessary to take oral medication to help control your blood glucose levels. If this is not effective, you may need more than one type of medication and/or insulin injections to control the glucose levels.

Emotional health

Women with type 2 diabetes have an increased risk of developing depression and so it is important to discuss your emotional health with your general practitioner or treating health professional. Many women feel ashamed and embarrassed when diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, as family, friends and advice from some health professionals can be negative and blameful.

These negative feelings of shame and blame do not help the situation, so it is important to understand that you are not alone and help is widely available. If you are feeling depressed or anxious about your diagnosis or managing your diabetes, it is important to seek help from your general practitioner. If your mood is not managed well, it can make it very hard to look after yourself properly and develop a healthier lifestyle; counselling may be required.

Where can I get more information?

www.jeanhailes.org.au or phone: 1800 151 441

www.healthforwomen.org.au

www.diabetesaustralia.com.au or phone: 1300 136 588

This resource was developed with the support of the Australian Department of Health and Ageing

This project is supported by a BRIDGES Grant from the International Diabetes Federation. BRIDGES, an International Diabetes Federation project,

is supported by an educational grant from Lilly Diabetes. Research underpinning this information has also been supported by the Brockhoff Foundation,

Helen McPherson Smith and L.E.W. Carty trust.

Updated January 2011

This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your health practitioner.

health tips

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods, by eating plenty of vegetables, legumes, fruit and wholegrain cereals. Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives.

Try to include fish 3–5 times a week (this can include canned fish, such as salmon, sardines and tuna).

Take time out just for you.

Make pelvic floor exercises a life-long habit — even if you have no symptoms.

Be active on most, or all, days of the week: you don't have to do a 30 minute walk, 3x10 minutes is just as good!

3 serves of dairy each day for good bone health.