

# Diabetes: living with diabetes



Diabetes (diabetes mellitus) is a chronic condition that can be associated with significant ill health especially if it is poorly controlled. Diabetes occurs when the body does not make enough insulin, and/or the body becomes resistant to the action of insulin.

Produced in the pancreas, insulin is a hormone that regulates the amount of glucose in the blood (blood sugar). Blood sugar is the fuel required by cells to function. When it remains high over many years, the blood vessels and nerves become damaged, causing severe complications.

Diabetes is a common cause of blindness, kidney failure, poor cardiovascular health and erectile dysfunction (impotence).

The number of people with diabetes in Australia has increased by more than 300 per cent within the past 20 years. Over one million Australians have diabetes, although up to half of people with type 2 diabetes remain undiagnosed.

## Types of diabetes

There are 2 types of diabetes, with very different causes.

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the insulin-secreting cells within the pancreas die. Lifelong insulin injections are needed, hence the previous title of 'insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus'.

Type 2 diabetes affects the majority of all people with diabetes, and often arises during or after middle-age, but it is increasingly occurring at a younger age. Obesity is a strong predisposing factor. Type 2 diabetes is a progressive disease — around 30 per cent of people with it will eventually require insulin injections to control their symptoms.

Others can be maintained by diet, exercise, and oral medicines to help control blood sugar levels within the body.

These medicines are known as oral hypoglycaemic agents. Type 2 diabetes was previously known as 'non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus'.

## Living with diabetes

Diabetes is a serious condition that requires close medical supervision, and careful monitoring through blood sugar testing to prevent or delay complications. People with a greater understanding of how to manage their condition tend to do better. If you have diabetes, ideally, you should understand the following.

The nature of your diabetes.

The need for close medical supervision.

The actions and side effects of oral hypoglycaemic agents or insulin.

How to recognise the symptoms of high blood sugar (hyperglycaemia) and low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia), and how to minimise these.

Good nutrition principles. Ideally, a dietitian should be consulted. People who are overweight greatly benefit from weight reduction.

The need for daily exercise.

The importance of home blood sugar monitoring. This requires a finger prick device, test strips and a blood glucose meter.

The need to give up smoking, as smoking is a major risk factor for many of the complications experienced by individuals with diabetes.

## Monitoring treatment

Regular visits to your GP or endocrinologist are essential. They are likely to recommend ophthalmology screening to monitor eye health, and supervise other aspects of diabetes care, such as kidney health, foot and skin care. Diabetes educators and dietitians are also regularly involved in educating patients in various aspects of diabetes management.

## Further information

If you are concerned about managing your diabetes, or the complications of diabetes and the side effects of relevant therapies, talk to your doctor or seek advice from your local hospital or diabetes centre.

Diabetes Australia also provides valuable support for patients and their families. It is a key organisation dedicated to raising the awareness of diabetes and to providing support for individuals with diabetes and their families.

Last Reviewed: 20 Feb 2019

## References

1. Diabetes Australia [website]. Diabetes in Australia. Available at: <http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/en/Understanding-Diabetes/Diabetes-in-Australia/> (accessed 2010, Mar 18)
2. Classification of diabetes [revised June 2009]. In: eTG complete [Internet]. Melbourne: Therapeutic Guidelines Limited; 2010 Mar. (Accessed 2010 Mar 18.)
3. Management plan for people diagnosed with diabetes [revised June 2009]. In: eTG complete [Internet]. Melbourne: Therapeutic Guidelines Limited; 2010 Mar. (Accessed 2010 Mar 18.)

Copyright: MIMS Australia, 2019. All rights reserved.

The material provided by MIMS Australia Pty Ltd is intended for Australian residents only, is of a general nature and is provided for information purposes only. The material is not a substitute for independent professional medical advice from a qualified health care professional. It is not intended to be used by anyone to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease or medical condition. No person should act in reliance solely on any statement contained in the material provided, and at all times should obtain specific advice from a qualified health care professional. MIMS Australia Pty Ltd, its servants and agents are not responsible for the continued currency of the material or for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies in the material, whether arising from negligence or otherwise, or from any other consequences arising there from.