



Diabetes is a metabolic disorder characterised by an increased amount of glucose in the blood.

Foods containing sugar are broken down to form glucose, the main source of energy for the body. Once in the blood stream the increased glucose levels stimulate the pancreas to release insulin which enables glucose uptake into cells. The blood glucose level then returns to normal.

Diabetes causes several effects: the body either produces too little insulin, no insulin at all, or the cells do not respond appropriately to the insulin that is produced. This means the body cannot utilise the glucose and it remains in the blood stream.

The first symptoms of diabetes is an excessive thirst, frequent passing of urine, fatigue, headaches and nausea. Children often appear listless and tetchy. However, many people do not recognise these symptoms and the disease goes undiagnosed. If left untreated diabetes can lead to blindness, kidney failure, limb amputation, heart disease and inevitably death.

There are three main types:

Type 1 - insulin dependant diabetes, most commonly found in young children and young adults. It is caused by destruction of the pancreatic cells which produce insulin. Daily injections of insulin are required for life.

Type 2 - non insulin dependent diabetes is more common, and is seen in older people, especially those who are overweight. This type of diabetes may run in families but is usually caused by lifestyle factors such as obesity and lack of exercise.

Gestational diabetes is a temporary diabetes that occurs during pregnancy.

A recent study of 85,000 nurses over 25 years confirms the critical roles that diet and lifestyle factors play in prevention of type 2 diabetes.

Of those that developed diabetes, **91% of these cases could have been avoided** by a change in diet and exercise. The study concluded, *“weight control was likely to offer the greatest benefit in preventing this form of diabetes in women”*.

How can you prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes?

You are most at risk if you are:

- Over 40
- Overweight
- Over 40 and have high blood pressure
- Have heart disease
- Do little or no exercise
- Family history
- Over 35 and from Aboriginal, Torres Strait, Indian or Chinese background
- Have had gestational diabetes

The most effective way to reduce this risk is to **maintain a healthy weight and exercise regularly**.

In terms of what to eat to prevent diabetes and for those who have diabetes the rules are very similar. **Eat a healthy, balanced diet**. This means lots of high fibre, unprocessed carbohydrates such as wholemeal or seeded breads (try yummy versions with nuts, sun dried tomatoes or herbs), potatoes, wild or brown rice, couscous, bulgur wheat, oatcakes and high fibre cereals such as porridge and muesli. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, and increase your intake of plant-based products such as lentils and beans.

When choosing protein, opt for lean meat, grilled oily fish (e.g. salmon, tuna, and sardines), eggs and cheese and avoid processed meats such as sausages, salami, bacon and ham.

Finally remember to watch the amount you eat! Portion control is one of the key successes of weight loss.

For more assistance with weight loss and prevention or management of diabetes contact Jo Beer at www.revitalise.com.au or call 08 9385 6153.

In short:

- 100,000 people WA have diabetes
- 50% are undiagnosed
- 50% are women
- Diabetes can cause heart disease, kidney failure, blindness, amputations and birth defects
- Diabetes causes a similar mortality risk seen in smokers
- Diabetes shortens life expectancy by up to 15 years
- Diabetes costs Australia \$3.1 billion every year

What you can do:

- Choose complex high fibre carbohydrates
- Eat 5 portions of vegetables and 3 portions of fruit per day
- Increase plant based foods
- Limit your intake of processed meats
- Get to a healthy weight
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day

Useful contacts:

www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
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