

What to Know About Diabetes?

You've probably heard of diabetes; you may even know someone who is diabetic. The most recent study from Diabetes UK found that 6.0% of the UK population have been diagnosed with the condition – around 3.2m in total¹ - so the chances are, at least one person on your street, in your book club or at your Zumba class has diabetes.

But how much do you really know about insulin, glucose, carb counting and the condition that is diabetes? We've put together a handy cheat sheet for those concerned about diabetes, with tips on how to manage the condition, and a few facts you might not know about the disease.

What is diabetes?

Put simply, diabetes is a condition where the pancreas either:

- a) does not produce insulin, or
- b) produces insulin which is resisted by the body

Insulin is the hormone which helps us transfer blood sugar into our cells. If the body is lacking in or resistant to insulin, our blood sugar levels rise, causing symptoms like drowsiness, nausea, extreme hunger, blurred vision and the need for frequent urination.

There are three types of diabetes:

Type 1 Diabetes

This form of diabetes is caused when the body attacks and destroys the cells that make insulin. It can happen at any age, but it's more common in younger people. Unfortunately, it is not reversible, and those with the condition will need to inject themselves with extra insulin several times a day.

Type 2 Diabetes

90% of diabetes sufferers in the UK have Type 2, which is more prevalent in those who are obese, or with a family history of diabetes. It's not curable, but it can be treated and managed with diet and exercise. As time goes on, sufferers may need tablets and insulin to supplement the diet and exercise.

Gestational Diabetes

The clue is in the name: this form of diabetes can occur during pregnancy. After the baby is born, it usually goes away – but women who develop gestational diabetes are more likely to develop Type 2 diabetes later in life. This form of diabetes is more common in those with a family history of diabetes, a very large infant in a previous pregnancy, or parental obesity.

Spotting the signs

As mentioned above, there are clear risk factors that are indicators of diabetes. Obesity is an important one, and those with a family history of the condition should also be aware of the symptoms. Here are the most common signs that you may be suffering with diabetes, or pre-diabetes – a precursor for the condition:

- You may pass urine more often than usual, especially at night
- Increased thirst or hunger can both be indicators of diabetes
- Extreme tiredness and fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Slow healing of cuts and wounds
- Blurred vision

If you experience any of these symptoms with regularity, see your GP for a blood glucose test.

Diabetes prevention

For those who haven't been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, there are steps which can be taken to prevent diabetes.

The first is to lose weight. 80% of those diagnosed with diabetes are overweightⁱⁱ, so losing a few pounds is a good way to stave off this condition and remain healthy.

The second way is to increase your exercise. Research has found that regular exercise can reduce the risk of developing diabetes by as much as 64%ⁱⁱⁱ. It doesn't have to be high intensity – go for a gentle bike ride a few times a week, join a local salsa dancing class, or head to the hills for a power walking afternoon with the girls.

Lastly – and most importantly – watch your sugar intake. Brush up on the sugar content of your favourite foods, and swap out those with high sugar for a low-sugar alternative. If you love a bar of chocolate with your afternoon tea, try making your own low-sugar options with some of our great SPLENDA® recipes. If you like a spoonful of the sweet stuff in your coffee, swap it for SPLENDA®, which is a low-calorie, sugar-free alternative that has little impact on blood sugar levels.

What can I do to manage diabetes?

If you've been diagnosed with diabetes, there are steps you can take to carry on with a normal, healthy, balanced lifestyle.

Everyone who is diagnosed with any form of diabetes will need to develop a plan to manage their sugar intake and blood sugar levels. This is totally personal to each individual, and it may take a little trial and error to find the method that works for you.

The most important thing is to reduce sugar intake and ensure that the body won't experience regular blood sugar spikes. This can be achieved in numerous ways, from commencing a low-carb diet, to swapping sugar for a sweetener like SLENDA® – which offers all the taste of sugar, without the calories or the blood sugar spike.

Exercise is also crucial in managing diabetes. Just 30 minutes of moderate exercise (brisk walking, dancing or swimming, for example) per day can help regulate blood sugar.

Lastly, it's important to develop a testing regimen. Checking your insulin levels is a personal thing, and it's important to get into a routine so you can better identify fluctuations and pinpoint the cause.

One last thing...

For many people, diabetes dictates the need for a lifestyle change, but it's not the end of the world. Making healthier decisions, doing more exercise and being careful with sugar intake can both prevent and manage diabetes, and many of those with the condition still enjoy balanced, happy lives.

ⁱ http://www.diabetes.org.uk/About_us/What-we-say/Statistics/Diabetes-prevalence-2013/

ⁱⁱ <http://www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-and-obesity.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/conditions-illnesses/5-ways-to-cut-your-chance-of-diabetes/>