

Diabetes

By Lin Aweti

Rising rates of diabetes have been identified by the Department of Health 2007. There are now 2.2 million people in the U.K living with the condition and a further 750,000 with Type 2 diabetes who do not know it.

Diabetes is a condition where the body loses the ability to control blood glucose (Sugar) properly. Glucose comes from food, particularly starchy and sugary foods known as carbohydrates. When digestion breaks down carbohydrates into glucose, it is absorbed into the bloodstream. Normally a gland called the pancreas produces a hormone called insulin, which allows the glucose to be taken from the blood and used for energy. When you have diabetes, there is a lack of insulin or the insulin produced does not work properly, therefore too much glucose stays in the bloodstream and cannot be used by the cells to produce energy. This will result in a person feeling tired and unwell, some of the increased glucose is lost from the kidneys resulting in passing large volumes of urine often during the night, this can lead to dehydration and thirst.

There are two types of diabetes Type 1 or Insulin dependent diabetes and type 2 or Non-Insulin dependent diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is when your body cannot make insulin. The cause of this problem is not known and it usually occurs at a young age, insulin injections will be needed for life.

Type 2 diabetes tends to occur in people over 40, although with the change in life style i.e. the increase of fast food and the reduction in exercise this condition is occurring in younger people. In Type 2 diabetes, the body still makes insulin but not enough to meet the body's needs this type accounts for about 85% of cases, and can sometimes be controlled with changes in the diet and an increase in exercise. Some cases however may also need to be prescribed tablets or in some cases insulin.

Eating regular healthy balanced meals will reduce the level of the blood glucose. The healthy diet is the same as recommended for everyone. A high fibre diet with vegetables, fruit, cereals, rice and pasta and a reduced intake of fatty and fried foods which are high in cholesterol such as cakes and butter. Also a reduction in sugary foods which contain refined sugar such as fizzy drinks and sweets and a reduction in salt. By adhering to a healthy diet, this will help in losing weight, which helps improve insulin resistance and a better control of the blood glucose levels, other benefits include a lower blood pressure, increased energy and increased self-esteem.

Regular exercise is good for everybody, being active helps the body to reduce insulin resistance and lower the blood glucose level. Other health benefits include weight loss, improved circulation and strengthens the heart. Before starting any exercise routine it is important to have a health check by a health professional. It is important for anyone with diabetes to check their blood sugar before exercise and have a snack first, also to carry fast-acting sugar such as glucose tablets or fruit juice and some long acting carbohydrates such as a cereal bar. It is also important to always carry medical identification. When possible exercise should be planned around the same time each day, usually about one to two hours after a meal, alternately have a plan for food and medication on days when activity varies.

Well fitting footwear and natural fibre socks should be worn as diabetes can affect the nerves and circulation in the feet. After exercise, inspect the feet for any blisters or sores as infections begin easily in diabetes; if the skin is broken seek advice from a health professional. It is also important to test the blood sugar after exercise and adjust the snack accordingly. The blood sugar can drop hours after exercise so a further test later is recommended.

Lin Aweti (RGN) has worked as a senior staff nurse in the community for the last 15 years. Working within a team of GPs, practice nurses and other health professionals to provide health promotion and support with self-management in conditions such as diabetes. For further information on diabetes go to www.diabetes.org.uk or ask for information from the General Practice surgery.



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