

Diabetes

Regulating your blood sugar level by modifying your lifestyle and eating habits, combined with regular medical check-ups can help to prevent complications from diabetes. The number of people with diabetes in Australia is three times higher than 25 years ago! Almost one in four Australians aged over 25 years has diabetes or are on the cusp of diabetes.

Many people with diabetes don't know that they have it!

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition in which the level of glucose (a sugar) in the blood is too high. This is caused by a problem with the hormone “insulin” and its role in controlling blood glucose levels.

Normal control of glucose

When the relationship between glucose and insulin is intact, the body controls glucose in the following way:

1. Glucose comes from food that contains carbohydrates (starch and sugar). After eating, blood glucose levels rise.
2. Glucose is absorbed into the blood stream and carried to the muscle and other body cells or the brain. Glucose provides the energy to perform everyday tasks, such as thinking, walking, talking and breathing.
3. Glucose can only enter the muscles with the release of insulin, which is made in the pancreas, into the blood.

How is diabetes treated?

Treatments are available for diabetes but prevention is preferred to avoid long-term complications by:

- Managing your weight through a healthy diet and exercise.
- Regularly monitoring your blood glucose and blood cholesterol levels.
- Having frequent blood pressure checks.

Classification values for fasting blood glucose levels by pricking the finger are:

- ❖ Normal blood glucose 4-6 mmol/L
- ❖ Moderate blood glucose 6-7 mmol/L
- ❖ High blood glucose Above 7 mmol/L

* Based on the Diabetes Australia targets for glycaemic control.

Complications of diabetes?

Over time, untreated high blood glucose levels will cause:

- Increased risk of heart attack or stroke
- Blood vessel and nerve damage
- Eye disease or blindness
- Kidney disease
- Poor circulation (sometimes requiring limb amputations)
- Foot problems
- Poor wound healing
- Impotence in men

People who are overweight or obese

Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes. In particular, people who have excess weight around their waist or abdomen, often described as central obesity, are at an even greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes. A person's waist measurement can be a good indicator of whether they are overweight or obese.

To help manage your diabetes, your meals need to be:

- An appropriate size – for you
- Regular and spread evenly throughout the day
- Lower in fat, particularly saturated fat
- Based on high fibre carbohydrate foods such as wholegrain breads and cereals, dried beans, lentils, starchy vegetables and fruits.

Top Dietary Tips

- Eat three main meals a day
- Include a starchy Low GI food at each meal
- Cut down on the amount of fat you eat
- Eat more fruit and vegetables
- Include more beans and lentils in your diet
- Aim for at least 2 serves of oily fish each week
- Limit sugar and sugary foods
- Reduce salt in your diet to 6g or less a day