

Diabetes

Diabetes

Diabetes is when you have high blood sugar levels over a period of time, because your body cannot regulate your blood sugar levels sufficiently. This will result in symptoms such as:

- Frequent urination
- Increased thirst
- Increased hunger
- Unintended weight loss
- Other signs: blurred vision, headache, fatigue, slow healing of wounds, itchy skin

If you suspect that you have diabetes, it is extremely important to go and see your doctor. Diabetes that are left untreated can result in serious complications, such as a stroke, kidney disease, foot ulcers, limb amputation, eye damage, coma and even death.

Causes

Insulin is a hormone that the pancreas secrete. Insulin removes sugar from your blood. Diabetes can either be due to your pancreas not producing enough insulin, or the cells of your body not responding properly to the insulin that you produce. Diabetes can either be due to an immune reaction (Type 1) or due to a combination of being overweight and eating a high sugar diet. (Type 2).

Prevention

Maintain a healthy lifestyle. (See page 85)

- Decrease your sugar intake (bread, soft drinks etc.)
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes, 4 to 5 times per week (See page 89-90)
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- DO NOT SMOKE

Help and support in the form of dietary plans, education, support groups and workshops can be found at:

- 'Diabetes South Africa' – 086 111 3913 (National helpline, 8am-4pm Mon-Thurs, 8am-2pm Friday)



Diagnosis

Diabetes are diagnosed by testing your blood sugar level on more than one occasion. Symptoms of diabetes and sugar in your urine can indicate diabetes. When someone is diabetic, they can use a finger prick test to test their blood sugar level in order to determine if their blood sugar level are being controlled and whether they are taking enough or too little medication.

Treatment

The treatment of diabetes is all about controlling your blood sugar levels. Depending on the type of diabetes this can either be done with oral medications or insulin injections, prescribed by a doctor. Treating your diabetes and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is extremely important.

Complications

Having diabetes (especially when your blood sugar levels are not being controlled) can lead to various complications, that you should be aware of. Examples are:

- Heart diseases
- Stroke
- Decreased blood supply to your limbs, which can lead to amputation if not picked up (always wear shoes and inspect your feet every day for black spots and pain)
- Eye, kidney & nerve damage
- Visual loss & blindness (try and visit an eye doctor once a year)
- Numbness & tingling pain in your fingers and toes

IMPORTANT

If a diabetic has too little sugar in their blood they will start sweating and trembling, breathe rapidly, become confused, aggressive, unconscious and experience seizures. If you see these signs the person should immediately sit down and eat or drink anything with sugar in it IMMEDIATELY (a fruit, a bar, bread, coke etc). Afterwards, go and see a doctor to determine the cause of your low blood sugar!

