

NATIONAL DIABETES WEEK: 9-14th NOVEMBER 2009

Beating Diabetes

Diabetes Mellitus is an abnormally high blood glucose (sugar) level caused by the inability of the body to either produce or respond to insulin properly. *Insulin* is a hormone necessary to carry glucose from the bloodstream into the body cells where it is used for energy. If there is too little insulin, blood glucose levels continue to rise, as glucose is not removed from the bloodstream.

In 2006, a reported **6,5 million South Africans** were living with diabetes, that number has since dramatically increased.

National Diabetes Week is aimed at creating awareness of diabetes and **World Diabetes Day**, celebrated on the 14th November; draws further attention to this very serious disease. **The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa** wants to inform the community of the risk factors and warning signs of diabetes and how to manage the disease and take control.

There are 4 different types of diabetes:

1) Type 1 diabetes

Also known as insulin dependent diabetes. It generally occurs in children, but is usually diagnosed before the age of 40 years. These individuals do not produce enough insulin and therefore life-long treatment (injection) with insulin is necessary. This type of diabetes is less easy to control than type 2 diabetes. Its onset is usually rapid and symptoms experienced are severe.

2) Type 2 diabetes

Also known as non-insulin dependent diabetes. This type of diabetes generally occurs in adults, is the most common form of diabetes and is often associated with obesity. These people still produce insulin and by following a healthier diet may control the disease. Others may still not produce enough insulin or the reaction to the insulin is inadequate. Oral medications are therefore necessary to stimulate the pancreas to make more insulin to be able to lower blood glucose, and in severe cases insulin injections may also be needed.

3) Gestational diabetes

This type of diabetes occurs during pregnancy and usually disappears after childbirth. It develops as a result of hormones released during pregnancy that increase the body's resistance to insulin. Women, who have had this form of diabetes, also face a higher risk of developing type 2 later in life.

4) Other specific types of diabetes results from specific genetic syndromes, surgery, drugs, malnutrition, infections and other illnesses.

Risk factors for developing diabetes include the following:

- Being aged 35 or over.
- Being overweight (especially if you carry most of your weight around your middle).
- Being a member of a high-risk group (in South Africa if you are of Indian descent you are at particular risk).
- Having a family history of diabetes.
- Having given birth to a baby that weighed over 4kg at birth, or have had gestational diabetes during pregnancy.
- Having high cholesterol or other fats in the blood.
- Having high blood pressure or heart disease.

Is diabetes preventable?

Scientists believe that **lifestyle** and **Type 2 diabetes** are closely linked. This means that your risk of getting diabetes is dependent on your lifestyle. A healthy diet, weight control, exercise, reduction in stress and no smoking are important preventative steps.

What happens if diabetes is left untreated?

Diabetes is always serious. If it is not well managed, the high levels of blood glucose associated with diabetes can slowly damage both the fine nerves and the small and large blood vessels in the body, resulting in a variety of complications i.e. **heart disease**, blindness, **stroke**, amputation, kidney disease and erectile dysfunction or impotence. Those with short term diabetes may be more susceptible to infections and in severe cases diabetes may cause coma.

The good news is that with careful management, these complications can be delayed and even prevented, but early diagnosis is very important.

What are the symptoms for diabetes?

- Constant thirst
- Increased hunger
- Urinating more than usual
- Numbness/tingling in finger tips and toes
- Unexplained weight loss
- Blurred vision / visual disturbances
- Skin infection due to slow wound healing
- Constant tiredness

Symptoms vary from individual to individual and elderly people may not present any symptoms.

How is it diagnosed?

A blood sample is taken to test for the **glucose level**. High blood glucose will usually indicate diabetes. If glucose is detected in a urine sample, it also indicates diabetes and will be confirmed with a blood test. Normal fasting blood glucose level is 4-6 mmol/l.

If you are experiencing any symptoms, please **get yourself tested today!**

How diabetes affects the heart?

Heart disease is the leading cause of diabetes-related deaths because the constant high blood sugar is associated with narrowing of the arteries, increased blood triglycerides (a type of fat), decreased levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart attack. As one gets older, blood vessels are damaged and narrow progressively (atherosclerosis). This could lead to a heart attack or stroke. Diabetics are more prone to the development of atherosclerosis and blood clot formation.

Smoking also causes damage to blood vessels and therefore diabetic smokers are at higher risk.

Can diabetes be cured?

Unfortunately, there is no cure for diabetes. With careful monitoring and commitment, diabetics can avoid complications and enjoy a long and productive life and by making an equally important commitment to reduce the risks of heart disease an increased quality of life is possible.

General dietary guidelines for a diabetic:

- Attain and maintain a healthy body weight
- Eat small, regular meals, including snacks and do not skip any meals or snacks
- Include plenty of fibre rich carbohydrates such as whole wheat bread, cereals, dry beans, vegetables and fruit
- Give preference to unrefined carbohydrates and avoid refined carbohydrates (products made from cake flour, sweets and foods containing sugar)
- Include at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables in your diet every day
- Limit fat intake, especially saturated fats (animal fats) and remove all visible fat from meat (and skin off chicken) before cooking
- Use healthier cooking methods such as steaming, baking in the oven, microwaving, boiling, braai over the fire instead of deep frying in oil or adding fat (mayonnaise, oil, margarine, butter, cheese, cream)
- Use non-stick cooking sprays
- Limit your intake of sugar, salt and alcohol
- Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day
- Do regular physical exercise i.e. 30-60 minutes at least 5 times per week.

For more information on how you can prevent or control diabetes, heart disease and stroke, contact the **Heart Mark Diet Line** on **0860 223 222** or visit www.heartfoundation.co.za or <http://www.diabetessa.co.za> for more information on Diabetes.

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The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA

News Release



THE HEART
AND STROKE
FOUNDATION
SOUTH AFRICA

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa is a community-based organisation established to reduce the incidence of heart disease and stroke in the population of South Africa by providing education and supporting vital research. For further information visit www.heartfoundation.co.za