

Diabetes Information Sheet

Your guide to diabetes - An introduction

What is diabetes?

Diabetes Mellitus is a common disorder that affects 2-3 people in every 100 of the population. There are two types of diabetes:

- Type 1 diabetes
- Type 2 diabetes

What happens in diabetes?

- Normally, a chemical (or hormone) called **Insulin** controls the levels of sugar (**Glucose**) in the blood.
- Glucose comes in fast and slow-acting forms from the food we eat.
- Fast acting or 'Sugary' foods include sweets, cakes and non-diet drinks.
- Slow acting or 'Starchy' (carbohydrate) foods include bread, pasta or potatoes. These are digested by the body and converted into glucose.
- Insulin is produced in the **Pancreas**, a gland that lies behind the stomach. Insulin allows glucose to move into muscles and the liver where it can be used to provide energy.
- Normally the body can produce enough insulin to keep the amount of glucose in the blood under control.
- Diabetes develops when there is a lack of (or no) insulin (Type 1) or when the body does not respond properly to the insulin that is produced (Type 2). This causes blood glucose levels to become too high
- Once the amount of glucose in the blood reaches a certain level, it then spills over into the urine.

What are the symptoms of diabetes?

The symptoms of diabetes can vary in severity and may develop quickly or over a longer period of time. **The main ones are:**

- Thirst and a dry mouth
- Passing a large amount of urine
- Weight loss
- Tiredness
- Thrush
- Blurring of vision

Most of the symptoms improve quickly after treatment to lower the blood glucose has been started. Blurring of vision may take several weeks or months to clear completely.

For more information please see the separate leaflets on type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

Some useful information for people with diabetes

Special 'diabetic' foods

- These are not advised. Often they are expensive and may cause diarrhoea.

Prescriptions

- These are free of charge if you are on tablets or insulin, but not if you are on diet alone.
- Complete a prescription exemption form that is obtainable from your GP or the DHS.

Equipment

- Blood glucose meters and finger-pricking devices can be bought from a pharmacy for about £15.00. Check with the nurse as to which type is most suitable for you.
- The following items are available on prescription:
 - Blood monitoring lancets and strips
 - Most insulin pen devices
 - Pen needles
 - Safe-clip
 - Urine testing strips

Driving

No matter how your diabetes is treated, you are legally obliged to inform your insurance company. Otherwise your driving insurance may not be valid.

- You also need to inform the DVLA if your diabetes is treated with insulin or if you have complications affecting your eyesight or legs.

Smoking

- Smoking significantly increases the risk of developing problems associated with diabetes.
- This is why all people with diabetes are advised to stop smoking.

Diabetes UK

- Diabetes UK can provide advice on all aspects of diabetes and provide a voice for everyone living with diabetes
- Diabetes UK is at 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA, Tel 020 7424 1000

- Diabetes UK Careline is a confidential information service, Tel 0845 120 2960
- You can find Diabetes UK on the internet at www.diabetes.org.uk
- There is a local branch of Diabetes UK
http://homepages.which.net/~david_g.buckley/diabetes.htm

Local contacts:

- Diabetes nurse specialist** at Milton Keynes Hospital. 01908 243089
- Your GP
- Your practice nurse

‘Adapted with permission from Tayside Diabetes Clinical Network leaflet’