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WESTERN CAPE
ASSOCIATION FOR
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES
TM. WCAPD

PO Box 1544
Millerton
7435

Phone : (021) 555-2881
Fax : (021) 555-2888
E-mail : director@wcapd.org.za
Website : www.wcapd.org.za

ShareCall : 0861 APD INFO
0861 273 4636

More information

Diabetes South Africa
(011) 886-3721
national@diabetessa.co.za

adding
value
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lives

Focus on... Diabetes

Types of Diabetes

There are three main types of diabetes -

Type 1 diabetes - occurs when the pancreas stops producing insulin. It usually starts in young people under the age of 30, including very young children and infants, and the onset is sudden and dramatic. People who have type 1 diabetes must inject insulin to survive. Insulin dosages are carefully balanced with food intake and exercise programmes. | more

Type 2 diabetes - is caused when the insulin, which the pancreas produces, is either not enough or does not work properly. Approximately 85 - 90% of all people with diabetes are type 2, and many people who have this condition are undiagnosed. Most type 2's are over 40. They are usually overweight and do not exercise. Type 2 diabetes may be treated successfully without medication. Often loss of weight alone will reduce glucose levels. Eating patterns and exercise play important roles in management. Tablets may be prescribed to help improve control, however, many type 2's will eventually use insulin.

Although type 2 is, in itself, not life threatening, in many ways it is more dangerous than type 1, as its onset is gradual and hard to detect. High blood glucose levels over a long period of time can cause serious damage to the delicate parts of the body and lead to blindness, heart attack/stroke, kidney failure, impotence and amputation. | more

Gestational diabetes - is a temporary condition that occurs during pregnancy. Both mother and child have an increased risk of developing diabetes in the future.

How serious is diabetes?

There is no such thing as 'mild' diabetes. Diabetes is always serious. If it is left untreated or 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.

These include heart disease, blindness, amputation, kidney disease and erectile dysfunction or impotence. The good news is that with careful management, these complications can be delayed and even prevented, but early diagnosis is very important.

You need to know what the symptoms of diabetes are and whether you are at risk.

Who is at risk?

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

Can you prevent diabetes?

Scientists believe that lifestyle and type 2 diabetes are closely linked. This means that lifestyle is one area which individuals can focus on to help prevent or delay the onset of the disease. A healthy diet, weight control, exercise, reduction in stress and no smoking are important preventative steps.

How do you know you have diabetes?

Early diagnosis of diabetes is extremely important if complications are to be prevented or delayed. If you are over 35 and have any of the risk factors highlighted in the "Who is at Risk" section, you should be tested every year. A simple finger-prick test at your local pharmacy or clinic can diagnose the strong likelihood that you may have diabetes within a minute.

How is diabetes treated?

Having diabetes need not mean the end of a normal, healthy life. People with diabetes need to first accept the fact that they have the condition and then learn how to manage it. This takes commitment and perseverance. The goal of diabetes management is to bring blood glucose levels into the normal range, that is, between 4-6mmol/l. There are various aspects of good diabetes management.

Education - All people with diabetes need to learn about their condition in order to make healthy lifestyle choices and manage their diabetes well. Join your local branch of Diabetes SA and attend courses in diabetes self-management. Make an appointment to see a Nurse Educator who will set you on the path to good diabetes management.

Healthy Eating - There is no such thing as a 'diabetic diet', only a healthy way of eating, which is recommended for everyone. However, what, when and how much you eat play an important role in regulating how well your body manages blood glucose levels. It's a good idea to visit a registered dietician who will help you work out a meal plan, which is suitable to your particular lifestyle and needs.

Exercise - Regular exercise helps your body lower blood glucose, promotes weight loss, reduces stress and enhances overall fitness and enjoyment of life.

Weight Management - Maintaining a healthy weight is especially important in the control of type 2 diabetes. Make an appointment to see a registered dietician who will work out a meal plan to help you lose weight.

Medication - People with type 1 diabetes require daily injections of insulin to survive. There are various types of insulin available in South Africa. Type 2 diabetes is controlled through exercise and meal planning and may require diabetes tablets and/or insulin to assist the body in making or using insulin more effectively.

Lifestyle Management - Learning to reduce stress levels in daily living can help people manage their blood glucose levels. Smoking is particularly dangerous for people with diabetes.