

Preventing Type 2 Diabetes

More than a million Australians have diabetes, but half of them don't know it. Of greater concern is how prevalent the disease is becoming: in the last decade there's been a 300% increase in cases. The most recent data shows 100,000 Australians are developing the disease each year and 70% of them will die prematurely from strokes and heart attacks.

What are the effects of diabetes?

When a person has diabetes their blood sugar levels are much higher than they should be. Among other things this damages blood vessels and nerves, particularly in the eyes and lower limbs, which can lead to blindness and infections (more than half of amputations in Australia are diabetes related). Diabetes also dramatically raises the risk of heart disease and stroke.

But Type 2 diabetes is a lifestyle disease, so changing your lifestyle means you can help prevent or delay its onset. If you have Type 2 diabetes, leading a healthy lifestyle will help you manage the condition and reduce the risk of complications.

Do those extra kilos really make a difference?

One of the biggest risk factors for developing diabetes is being overweight or obese. By reducing weight, you lower insulin resistance, so your natural insulin can do a better job at lowering your blood glucose levels. Studies show that people at high risk for Type 2 diabetes can prevent or delay the onset by losing 5 to 7% of their body weight.

The best way to do this - and to improve a whole host of other health conditions in the process - is to eat healthier and incorporate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity into your life most days.

Nutrition

Look for foods that are low in saturated fat and have a low Glycemic Index (GI). The GI ranks carbohydrates according to how quickly they break down and

raise glucose levels in your blood. Low GI foods include:

- *grains and oats*
- *most vegetables*
- *many fruits*
- *pasta*
- *beans and lentils*

Limit high fat/high kilojoules foods and eat small snacks throughout the day rather than letting yourself get too hungry.

Exercise

When you exercise, your body uses more of the glucose in your blood to get the energy it needs. The more active you are, the more glucose your body uses; even after you stop exercising, your blood glucose levels can stay low for several hours.

Exercise is also an important factor in losing weight or maintaining an ideal

weight. If you're taking insulin or other medication that can affect your blood glucose levels, it's important to make sure that you always carry some fast acting sugar, such as jelly beans or glucose tablets with you when you exercise.

Are you at risk?

You're more likely to develop diabetes if:

- *you're overweight or obese*
- *you have high blood pressure*
- *you have high LDL cholesterol (or low HDL 'good' cholesterol)*
- *you exercise less than three days per week*
- *you have a family history of diabetes*
- *you've had gestational diabetes or gave birth to a baby that weighed more than 9 pounds*

See your doctor for more information.

Source: AHM Total Health 2007.



Want More information?

Another useful source of information is Diabetes Australia
www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

