

Health

Early detection: the key to fighting diabetes

Around 280 Australians develop diabetes every day. That's one person every five minutes. According to Diabetes Australia too many are being diagnosed late putting them at risk of major life-threatening health problems. With the number of people with diabetes in Australia sitting at around 1.7 million, it's a serious and growing health problem. Early diagnosis, treatment, ongoing support and management can reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications.

Care coordinator and diabetes educator on the complex care team at Castlemaine Health, Antoinette O'Shaughnessy says the prevalence of the disease has led many people to think it's not a serious condition. "Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in adults, kidney failure and preventable limb amputations. It also increases the risk of heart attacks and stroke by up to four times," says Antoinette.

"It's not uncommon for people in our cardiac program to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes at the same time as they have their heart attack."

"With early detection and proper management many of these serious cardiac events could possibly be prevented."

Antoinette says that while people can initially be overwhelmed by a diabetes diagnosis, managing the disease is essentially about staying a step ahead.

"Diabetes is a progressive condition so the sooner we diagnose and commence treatment, the better your prospects," she says.

"People can be reluctant to come in and work with a diabetes educator but the programs we set are very manageable. Eating well, being active, managing your weight, not smoking, taking your medications and managing stress will be your best tools to keep complications at bay."

Being active is particularly effective. Insulin's job is to get glucose out of the blood stream and into the muscle cells for energy. Moving helps the muscles use glucose already in the bloodstream while also keeping weight under control and maintaining blood flow.

"It's quite amazing to see what happens to a person's blood glucose levels after they've exercised," says Antoinette.

"And as long as it's regular, it can be any kind of exercise you like."

Martin Burghardt, a podiatrist at Castlemaine Health, says when it comes to improving blood flow to the feet and lower legs, walking is best. Martin sees first-hand how important not only exercise but also the effective monitoring and management of diabetes can be in terms of lower limb health.

"Nerve damage in the lower limbs is common for people with diabetes," says Martin.

"This means that little things like the pain of an ulcer can go undetected and become a much bigger problem."

"Lower limb ulcers are the number one reason people with diabetes are admitted to hospital, and with 4,400 amputations still being performed each year, daily routines



around foot inspections and monitoring blood glucose readings are very important."

"We recommend an annual assessment with a podiatrist to pick up any signs of neuropathy, or nerve damage." Castlemaine Health works closely with Castlemaine District Community Health to provide a range of services to help people with diabetes understand and manage their condition, including one-on-one education, support groups, diabetes supplies and outreach services.

"We understand that it can be difficult to follow all the recommendations, so we do all we can to work with people and support them," says Antoinette.

Q&A DIABETES & DIET

Castlemaine Health dietitian
Brianna Hillard answers
your questions

Q: How will I balance my diet with feeding my family?

A: There's no such thing as a diabetic diet anymore, what's recommended is just a normal, healthy diet. Eating well helps manage your blood glucose levels and your body weight. There's no need to prepare separate meals or buy special foods, just eat the recommended amount of food from the five food groups.

Q: What are low GI foods and why are they important?

A: Carbohydrates produce glucose at different rates. The glycemic index or GI is a way of describing how quickly a carbohydrate is digested and enters the blood stream. Low GI carbohydrates enter the blood stream slowly which means blood sugar levels aren't as up and down. This makes them a better option, especially for people with diabetes. Examples include traditional rolled oats, whole grains, dense whole grain breads, lentils and legumes, sweet potato, milk, yogurt, pasta and most types of fresh fruit.

Recognise the signs

Type 1 Diabetes

Occurs most frequently in people under 30 years, but can occur at any age. Thought to be an autoimmune disorder, it attacks the cells of the pancreas preventing them from producing any insulin. It is not linked to lifestyle factors, cannot be cured and cannot be prevented.

Signs of type 1 diabetes (the 4 Ts):

- **Thirsty:** Being excessively thirsty
- **Toilet:** Passing more urine
- **Tired:** Feeling tired and lethargic
- **Thinner:** Unexplained weight loss

You should seek medical advice if you notice the 4Ts, particularly in children or young adults.

Type 2 Diabetes

A serious, progressive and complex condition where the body becomes resistant to the normal effects of insulin and/or gradually loses the capacity to produce enough insulin. Type 2 diabetes is associated with both genetic and modifiable lifestyle risk factors.

An estimated two million Australians are at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes and it's possible to have the condition for up to seven years before it's diagnosed. People are at a higher risk if they:

- Have a family history of diabetes
- Are older (over 55 years of age)
- Are over 45 years of age and overweight
- Are over 45 years of age and have high blood pressure

- Are over 35 years of age and from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
- Are over 35 years of age and from Pacific Island, Indian subcontinent or Chinese cultural background
- Are a woman who has given birth to a child over 4.5kgs (9 lbs), had gestational diabetes when pregnant, or had Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome.

Signs of Type 2 Diabetes happen more gradually and include:

- Feeling tired
- Being more thirsty
- Passing more urine
- Having cuts that heal slowly
- Itching and skin infections
- Blurred vision
- Mood swings

If you are experiencing these signs speak to your GP. They'll be able to assess your level of risk and arrange a test.

Gestational diabetes

Occurs in about 5 - 10 per cent of pregnancies and usually disappears after birth. Managing gestational diabetes is very important for mums and babies. Having gestational diabetes significantly increases a woman's risk of developing type 2 diabetes so ongoing monitoring is recommended.



Castlemaine Health dietitian Brianna Hillard, podiatrist Martin Burghardt and care coordinator and diabetes educator Antoinette O'Shaughnessy.

For more information or to arrange an appointment contact
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Send us your questions or tips about health and wellbeing

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