



## Factsheet

# Diabetes

There are currently 3.9 million people living with a diagnosis of diabetes in the UK. By 2025 that figure is expected to rise to 5.3 million. Of the 3.9 million, 90% have type 2 diabetes which is largely preventable. It is further estimated that there are an additional 1 million people living with undiagnosed diabetes and a further 2 million who are at risk of developing it (Diabetes UK). Understanding your risk of developing type 2 diabetes and knowing how to reduce that risk is therefore essential if these staggering figures and the disability and costs that go with it are to be stemmed.

### What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a serious condition that causes high sugar levels in the blood. The hormone insulin, which is produced by cells in the pancreas, acts like a key enabling the sugar in your blood to enter the cells where it is used to produce energy or to be stored for later use. This system breaks down in diabetes and without sufficient insulin the sugar levels remain high in the blood stream and if left, can overtime cause serious damage to various organs.

There are two main types of diabetes:

**Type 1** occurs where the blood sugar level is too high because the body cannot make insulin. This occurs when the body's immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. The cause

is unknown, but this type of diabetes is not related to diet or lifestyle. Symptoms tend to come on quickly and usually over a matter of weeks. Type 1 diabetes is a serious and lifelong condition and tends to affect children more often. About 10% of people with diabetes in the UK have type 1 diabetes (Diabetes UK).

**Type 2** diabetes occurs where the pancreas either cannot make enough insulin or the insulin it does make cannot work properly leading to high blood sugar levels. It is also a serious condition and can be lifelong. It usually appears in middle-age or older people but in more recent years is also affecting younger overweight people, including children. 90% of people with diabetes in the UK have this type of diabetes. However, the risk of developing type 2 diabetes can be reduced by simple changes in lifestyle.

## Complications of diabetes

If diabetes is undetected or poorly managed, it can lead to chronic complications which occur gradually over a long period of time. This can cause serious damage to your blood vessels and means that blood cannot flow so easily to the various parts of the body causing damage to those areas. Nerves may also be damaged by the high sugar levels leading to tingling, numbness and loss of feeling, particularly in the feet. The following are some of the serious complications that may result:

- Eye problems and even blindness (retinopathy)
- Heart attacks and strokes
- Foot damage and risk of amputation
- Kidney damage

This is why early diagnosis with proper monitoring and management of your diabetes is so important.

## What are the signs and symptoms of diabetes?

As noted above many people may not even be aware they have diabetes or are in the early stages of developing it. It is important therefore for people to educate themselves about the early signs to look out for so medical advice can be sought early. Those early signs include:

- Needing to pass urine more frequently
- Feeling thirsty
- Excessive tiredness
- Losing weight without trying to
- Itchiness

Other symptoms may also include:

- Increased hunger
- Blurred vision
- Numbness or tingling in the feet or hands
- Genital itching or thrush
- Sores or wounds that take longer to heal or do not heal

## Who is at risk of developing diabetes and what can be done to reduce it?

In type 1 diabetes, the cause is unknown but may be triggered by a viral or other infection. There is also a higher risk if a close family member has it.

In type 2 diabetes, there are certain factors which are known to increase the risk including:

- Being overweight - which is said to be the most potent risk factor, accounting for about 80-85% of the risk (Diabetes UK)
- A family history of diabetes

- Ethnicity - Asian, African-Caribbean or black African origin
- People with conditions known to increase the risk, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol

If you are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes there are a lot of small changes you can make to prevent diabetes from developing in the first place, such as maintaining a normal weight, eating a diet with less sugar and refined carbohydrates and taking regular physical exercise.

Diabetes UK has a helpful tool called 'Know your risk' which scores people on their risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The Healthier You: NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme will also help you to assess your score. If your score is moderate or high, these organisations will help you refer yourself to a local scheme which provides free advice on health and lifestyle changes to reduce the risk of developing diabetes.

## Treatment

Early diagnosis and maintaining good control of your blood sugar levels with diet and insulin or other tablet medication is essential in reducing the risk of developing any of the diabetic related complications noted above.

As part of the care following diagnosis, you should be monitored regularly via your GP and various diabetic, foot, vascular and eye clinics. Eye screening for example, will detect problems early and prevent sight loss, and learning how to look after your feet will help you avoid infection from wounds or sores that could potentially lead to amputation.

Diabetic Nurses with their specialist knowledge and understanding will also be invaluable in educating and guiding you in managing your diabetes.

## Further information and support

Diabetes affects people in different ways depending on the type of diabetes and in addition, whether any complications have also developed.

However you are affected, Diabetes UK, [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk) can provide further information and support for people living with diabetes.

## Clinical negligence

As noted above, early diagnosis and good management will ensure the risk of developing diabetes related complications is reduced.

Diabetic related claims are often the result of misdiagnosis or poor management and it may be that opportunities to diagnose your condition earlier were missed and/or the monitoring and treatment has been

inadequate leading to complications which otherwise may have been avoided.

Our NHS provides an outstanding service for the most part, but sadly mistakes do happen. If you feel a mistake has been made by a healthcare professional, leading to a delay in diagnosing and/or managing your diabetes, you may be entitled to pursue a claim for compensation.

Moore Barlow has vast experience in dealing with claims

relating to diabetes. If you have concerns about your own treatment or that of a loved one, please do call us for an initial discussion.



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