

Health & Fitness Tips

Diabetes

Diabetes mellitus is a significant cause of death and disability in Australia today, and with the rise in obesity levels worldwide, its prevalence is increasing.

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition where the body cannot maintain normal blood glucose levels. It is caused by resistance to, or deficient production of, the hormone insulin, which helps glucose move from the blood into the cells. The glucose is then used by the body for fuel. When this movement does not occur, the glucose can not be utilised and blood glucose levels rise.



Types of Diabetes

Type 1 Diabetes: accounts for 10-15% of all people with diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is characterised by a complete deficiency of insulin, and people with this form of diabetes require insulin therapy (given by injection) to control their blood glucose levels. The onset is usually sudden and it can be triggered by environmental factors such as viruses, diet or chemicals in people genetically predisposed.

Type 2 Diabetes: accounts for 85-90% of all people with diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is a result of reduced production of insulin or the inability of the body to use insulin properly. Both genetic and environmental factors contribute to the onset of type 2 diabetes. The major risk factors include:

- increasing age
- excess weight, particularly around the waistline
- physical inactivity
- poor diet and nutrition
- impaired glucose tolerance

Type 2 diabetes affects about 7% of the adult Australian population, and about 25% of Australian adults have impaired glucose tolerance, a condition which, if left unchecked, usually leads to the development of type 2 diabetes.

Gestational Diabetes: About 4-6% of Australian women with no history of diabetes develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy. Risk factors include a family history of diabetes, increasing maternal age and obesity. It carries health risks for the infant and the mother will have an increased risk of developing diabetes later in life.

If undetected or poorly controlled, diabetes can result in long term health problems such as blindness, kidney failure, neuropathy, amputation, heart attack, stroke and erectile dysfunction. Fortunately, by making a few lifestyle changes, glucose metabolism can be improved significantly, overcoming the problem of insulin resistance. A diet low in saturated fats, combined with low G.I. carbohydrates, a wide variety of vegetables, some healthy oils and some increased physical activity will help reduce the risk of developing diabetes.