

HEALTHY AGEING WITH DIABETES - HELPFUL TIPS

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Approximately 1 million Australians have been diagnosed with diabetes and it is estimated to be over 2 million by 2020. (1)

Statistics show that only about half of Australians are achieving adequate control of their diabetes and research goes on to suggest that people frequently experience difficulty making the required lifestyle changes. (4)

High blood glucose levels cause damage to cells and organs in our bodies. If blood glucose levels continue at high levels, people are at higher risk of developing diabetes complications. (2) Diabetes complications keep us in poor health and can also shorten our life expectancy.

It is thought that genetic factors and lifestyle choices put us at greater risk of developing diabetes (3). If we think of prevention and reducing the complications of diabetes we need to think about our lifestyle and environment.

The increasing incidence of diabetes, according to experts is due to rising levels of obesity, poor diet, our ageing population and decreasing levels of physical activity. (3)

If you have been diagnosed with diabetes it is important to listen to medical advice and follow recommendations to remain healthy.

Some helpful tips

- Check your blood sugar levels regularly but have a formal BGL* done every 6 months
- Have an annual eye examination
- Check your weight at least every 3 months
- Have your GP check your blood pressure regularly
- Check your feet regularly but have a full foot assessment approximately every 6 months – podiatry services are available for this (be guided by your specialist)

- Have your cholesterol checked annually
- Have a urine test annually
- Nutrition – keep to your diabetic diet. There are lots of fabulous recipes available. (visit a dietician, look online or in cooking books for recipes)
- Maintain some form of physical activity (discuss these ideas with your GP particularly if your BGL's are consistently unstable or you are on insulin)
- There can be some driving restrictions if you have diabetes. Check with your GP and the licensing authority in your state or territory (2)

Some helpful tips if you are travelling

- Have a health check before you leave
- Have an understanding of the signs of a hypoglycaemic episode and know what to do
- Ensure health/travel insurance covers pre-existing conditions
- Have a letter from your GP stating your medical condition and your medications
- Carry a supply of medications/syringes, test strips etc. If you are in a plane, ensure they are in your cabin baggage
- Discuss with customs and airline crew, to ensure the packaging of your medication and syringes is accepted as cabin luggage
- Put new batteries in your glucometer, and take a spare set
- Carry snack foods
- Take comfortable well-fitting shoes
- Allow yourself rest time on your trip, especially if you are flying long distances

*BGL: Blood Glucose Level

References

1. Australian Government (2010) Co-ordinated care for patients with Diabetes. National health and hospital network fact sheet.
2. www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
3. Lipsky, M.S and Sharp, L.K (2004) Preventive therapy for Diabetes: Lifestyle changes and the primary care physician. American family physician. Jan 15, Vol 59 issue 2
4. Henderson, J (2012) Diabetes self management and social influences. Australian Nursing Journal Nov 12, vol 20, no. 5

Better health, brighter life