

# Diabetes

## What is Diabetes?

Diabetes currently affects about 2.3 million people in the UK, and there are more than half million people with diabetes who have the condition and don't know it. It is a condition in which the amount of sugar (glucose) in the blood is too high because the body is unable to process the glucose properly.

Glucose comes mainly from the digestion of starchy foods such as bread, rice and potatoes and from sugar and other sweet foods (cakes, biscuits, confectionery and soft drinks).

There are two main types of diabetes: Type 1 (insulin dependent) and Type 2 (non-insulin dependent).

## Type 1 (Insulin Dependent Diabetes)

People with this type of diabetes are unable to produce any insulin and so cannot use glucose for energy (causing rapid weight loss) and cannot control the level of blood glucose. This can often become very high, potentially damaging the circulatory system, nerves, eyes and kidneys. Those with type 1 diabetes have to control their blood sugar levels with injections of insulin, and exercise. Type 1 diabetes is the least common of the two main types and accounts for 5-15% of all people with diabetes.

## Type 2 (Non-insulin Dependent Diabetes)

People with this condition are able to produce some insulin but not enough for the body's needs, or the insulin they produce is not working effectively. Out of the 2.3 million diagnosed diabetics in the UK, 85-95% of all people with diabetes are type 2. Numbers are increasing rapidly and this is thought to be due to the rise in obesity and increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Sufferers are at greater risk from cardiovascular disorders such as heart disease, stroke, hypertension and also damage to nerves, eyes and the kidney. This type of diabetes can be controlled by lifestyle changes (healthier diet and more exercise). Overweight patients are encouraged to lose weight and exercise helps control blood glucose levels. If the diabetes still remains uncontrolled, tablets and insulin may be prescribed.

## A healthy balanced diet plays an important part in managing both types of diabetes.

Diabetes UK does not recommend a special diet for people with diabetes. The diet is based on the same healthy eating principles that are recommended for the general population. This basically involves eating a balanced diet based around starchy foods, fruit and vegetables and food which is low in fat, salt and sugar and high in fibre. Exercise is also recommended to control blood sugar levels and aid weight loss.

No foods are banned and people with diabetes do not need to eat special diabetic products.

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## Basic Rules

- **Eat 3 regular meals a day:** This helps to control blood glucose levels. Meals should be based on starchy foods such as bread, pasta, potatoes, rice and cereals. Choose wholegrain and wholemeal varieties where possible.
- **Avoid being overweight:** It is more difficult to control diabetes if you are overweight. Aim to keep your BMI (Body Mass Index) between 20-25.
- **Eat less fat and fewer fatty foods:** Reduce intake of fried foods and cut down on fatty foods such as butter, margarine, cheese, nuts and fatty meats. Choose low fat spreads and cheeses, lean meats and skimmed or semi-skimmed milk. Grill, bake, casserole, boil or microwave instead of frying.
- **Eat more fruit and vegetables:** Aim for at least five servings a day. Fresh, frozen, tinned, juiced and dried all count. However, juice is high in sugar so try to limit your intake to one small glass a day.
- **Cut down on sugar and sugary foods and drinks:** It is not necessary to avoid sugar completely. Sugar can be used as an ingredient in foods and in baking as part of a healthy diet. However, use sugar-free, low sugar or diet squashes and fizzy drinks, as sugary drinks cause blood glucose levels to rise quickly.
- **Cut down on salt:** A high intake of salt can result in high blood pressure. Use fewer processed foods, crisps, nuts and salty meats. Flavour foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.
- **Eat more oily fish:** Try to aim for 2 portions of oily fish a week, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines. These contain omega 3, which is thought to help protect against heart disease.
- **Drink alcohol in moderation:** Alcohol can make hypo- and hyper- glycaemia (low or high blood glucose levels) more likely to occur, so it is better to have it with, or after, a meal. It is also harder to recognise the symptoms of a hypo if you have had too much to drink. The maximum recommended consumption of alcohol is 3 units of alcohol per day for men and 2 for women.
- **Avoid special diabetic products:** Diabetic products offer no special benefits. They tend to be expensive and generally contain the same amount of fat and calories as similar non-diabetic foods. Products such as canned fruit in natural juice, reduced sugar or pure fruit jams, sugar free or diet drinks and diet yoghurts are widely available and are a great help to people with diabetes.

- **Product list:** At 3663 we do not carry a range of diabetic specific products. However, we have certain products within our existing range which might be suitable for incorporating into a healthy, balanced diet. For a selection of reduced fat, sugar and reduced salt products available from 3663 please give the Advice Centre a ring.

We can also provide recipe packs for those wishing to cater for people with Diabetes or those who wish to follow a Healthy Eating lifestyle.