

WHAT IS DIABETES?

There are two main types of diabetes – Type 1 and Type 2. They are different conditions but are both serious if not taken seriously and treated. There are some other rarer types of diabetes too, but what all of them have in common is that they cause sufferers to have too much glucose in their blood.

We all need glucose for energy, but diabetes occurs when our body cannot make enough insulin in our pancreas to break down that glucose.

Diagnosis is by either a blood and/or urine test and may be picked up when you are being investigated for another condition.

Who is at Risk?

Type 1. It is thought that Type 1 diabetes can be caused by an immune reaction (the body attacks itself in error), but the reasons are not clear. Family history can have a bearing e.g. having a parent, brother, or sister with type 1 diabetes. Age is also an issue, and you can get type 1 diabetes at any age, but it is more likely to develop when you are a child, teenager or young adult.

Type 2. You are at risk for developing Type 2 diabetes if you:

- Have prediabetes
- Are overweight
- Are 45 years or older
- Have a parent, brother, or sister with type 2 diabetes
- Are physically active less than 3 times a week

The good news is that by increasing the amount of exercise that you take coupled with making a change in your personal diet and lifestyle, some people can stave it off and return to a 'normal' healthy state. However, it is important that you are regularly monitored by your GP, as some people may have to take medication to help control the condition.

There are around 3.4 million people in England with Type 2 diabetes with around 200,000 new diagnoses each year according to the NHS. While Type 1 cannot be prevented and is not linked to lifestyle, Type 2 is largely preventable through lifestyle changes.

What are the Symptoms?

The common symptoms of diabetes include:

- Going to the toilet a lot, especially at night
- Being really thirsty
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Losing weight without trying to
- Genital itching or thrush
- Cuts and wounds take longer to heal
- Blurred vision

If any of these symptoms manifest themselves, it is important that the patient should consult their GP without delay.

What support is out there?

National Support: For someone heading towards Type 2, your GP can refer you to the national NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme which aims to educate you on the causes, and what needs to be done to help.

Local level support: Some GP surgeries have links to local diabetes support groups. Contact your practice to establish, if they, in partnership with other practices locally, can refer you to a local support group. Alternatively, 'Google' "Diabetes local support groups" and you will be presented with a list of what is available.

Other Articles of Interest and Research Papers

Diabetes UK, a national charity dedicated to supporting those affected by diabetes and funding research into the causes and cure, has a website with a cornucopia of information. It can be found at www.diabetes.org.uk

NHS England's website on the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme <https://www.england.nhs.uk/diabetes/diabetes-prevention/> is worth visiting as it explains what the programme and routes potential Programme participants through their GP.