

# Carmen Fernandes: Healthy eating and being active reduces the risk of diabetes complications



Diabetes  
New Zealand

Diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in February 2005, Carmen Fernandes is taking the right steps to improve her health. By making simple changes to her everyday eating and building up her physical activity, she has reduced the risk of developing complications from diabetes.

Carmen, a 38 year old administrator with the Waitakere City Council in Henderson, is originally from Bombay in India. She put on weight after her son was born six years ago, and with a family history of diabetes Carmen's doctor suggested she have a Glucose Tolerance Test. 'Both my father and his mother had Type 2 diabetes when they were older so I was quite shocked to get it at a younger age.'

Following her diagnosis, Carmen started taking one tablet of metformin twice a day with meals. She attended the diabetes clinic at National Women's at Auckland Hospital and a dietitian

Carmen follows the advice of her doctor and dietitian to eat healthy foods, especially to reduce the amount of carbohydrate and fat in the Indian meals she prepares at home for her family:



- Use basmati rice as this has a lower glycaemic index (it is more slowly absorbed) than traditional types of rice
- Have small servings of rice
- Cut down on roti - Carmen now eats one roti with a meal instead of two
- Eat only one carbohydrate at each meal - for example, roti or rice
- Do not add oil or butter to roti before cooking - Carmen cooks it dry
- Choose chicken without the skin and meat without fat for curries
- Eat wholegrain bread, high in fibre, instead of white bread
- Avoid frying onion in oil for curries - Carmen puts the onion straight into the curry as the main taste comes from the marsala
- Eat legumes, lentils or beans 3-4 times each week - Carmen recommends lentil dhal
- Add in 3-4 servings of vegetables each day - Carmen enjoys spinach, silverbeet, green beans, cabbage, cauliflower, capsicums, tomatoes, onions, carrots and eggplant
- Choose 3-4 fruit from a rainbow of colours each day - apples, nectarines, oranges, and kiwifruit are Carmen's favourites.

explained the importance of eating the right foods, especially the effects of eating sugar and carbohydrates on blood glucose levels. 'I stopped eating sweets and cut down on the amount of bread and rice I was eating. To date I have lost around 10kg.'

Carmen has also become more active. She now walks for half an hour to work five days a week, and then half an hour home. 'I regularly test my blood glucose levels. My blood glucose is always in the healthy range and the two HbA1c tests I've had were perfect.'

With healthy eating and more physical activity helping to control her blood glucose levels, Carmen has been able to reduce her medication.

As a newly diagnosed person with diabetes, Carmen recommends the Diabetes New Zealand website, [www.diabetes.org.nz](http://www.diabetes.org.nz), for information about living with Type 2 diabetes and managing the condition. She also appreciates the diabetes literature from her diabetes nurse. 'Although I haven't had diabetes for long, I know that controlling my blood glucose levels will help to stop me getting complications from diabetes such as foot problems.'

As well as helping to control her blood glucose levels, Carmen's lifestyle changes have given her other benefits. 'I'm feeling good about losing weight and I'm in control of my diabetes. My dietitian showed me an example of how much 10kg weighs. I was surprised I used to carry all that around. Cutting down on the total amount of food I eat and walking for an hour each day during the week has made me feel so much better.'



'I'm in control of my diabetes.'