



Diabetes Awareness Week 17-23 November 2009 The Complications of Diabetes

Diabetes diagnosed early and managed well can reduce your risk of long-term complications.

If you have diabetes you can reduce the risk of long-term damage from diabetes by:

- Achieving and maintaining good control of your blood glucose levels.
- Controlling high blood pressure and high blood lipids.
- Keeping all appointments with your healthcare team.
- Reporting any concerns about your health to your doctor.
- Following a healthy lifestyle.

Ask your doctor or nurse to check your diabetes every year at your free annual check to ensure that you aren't developing complications.

Many parts of your body can be affected by diabetes including your eyes, heart, kidneys and feet.

Depression

Living with diabetes is a challenge and can be difficult at times. You don't have to deal with your diabetes alone. With the support of your family and friends, your healthcare team, your local diabetes society you can take charge of your diabetes.

Feeling sad or unable to cope from time to time is normal, but if your low mood persists, it may be depression. People with diabetes are twice as likely to experience depression as those without diabetes.

Recognising and treating depression can improve your diabetes management and quality of life. If you have symptoms of depression, talk to a family member or friend and to your healthcare team.

Eyes

Damage to the small blood vessels in the back of the eye can cause loss of vision and lead to blindness if not treated. This may occur before you notice any change to your eyesight. Early damage can be successfully treated with laser therapy. It is important that you get your eyes checked by a specialist every two years. If you are pregnant, your doctor may check your eyes more often.

You can help yourself by:

- Controlling your blood glucose levels.
- Treating high blood pressure.
- Reporting any changes in vision to your doctor

Gums and Teeth

People with diabetes are more likely to have problems with their teeth and gums. Controlling your blood glucose can help prevent dental problems. Brush and floss your teeth twice a day and visit your dentist at least once a year.

Heart disease and stroke

People with diabetes are at greater risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

You can help yourself by:

- Not smoking
- Losing weight, if you are overweight.
- Eating healthy food.
- Keeping your blood pressure under control and getting it checked regularly.
- Taking your medication as directed by your healthcare team.
- Exercising regularly and staying physically active.

Diabetes can also affect your cholesterol levels. Get your blood cholesterol levels checked regularly.

Kidneys

Diabetes may cause damage to your kidneys. Although you may not get any symptoms, damage to the kidneys can be detected at an early stage by your doctor. Effective treatment can prevent progression to renal failure.

Good blood pressure control and regular checks from your healthcare team are important.

You can help yourself by:

- Managing your diabetes – take your medication, make healthy food choices, maintain a healthy weight, keep active and monitor your blood glucose level.
- Having your blood pressure checked regularly.
- Not smoking.

Sexual Dysfunction

Diabetes can damage the blood vessels of the penis resulting in difficulty getting an erection. Woman with diabetes have an increased chance of getting vaginal thrush.

Feet

Diabetes can lead to nerve damage and numbness. You must be careful to protect your feet from damage or injury. Foot care is an important daily task. Gradual loss of feeling in the feet increases the risk of damage and foot ulcers.

Diabetes can cause two main problems with the feet:

1. Nerve damage (Neuropathy). This may result in the loss of feeling in your feet and can lead to foot ulcers and infections. Early signs of nerve damage include: burning sensation, pins and needles, numbness or shooting pains.
2. Blood vessel disease (peripheral vascular disease). This may result in wounds taking longer to heal and getting infected more easily. Symptoms of blood

vessel damage include: feet cool to touch, calf pain during exercise, or thin or dry skin on feet and legs.

Check your feet and your toenails every day, and look for broken skin, cuts, cracks, blisters, redness, swelling or signs of infection. If you can't see your feet easily, use a mirror. See your doctor about any injury that isn't healing.

Other complications

Nerve damage can cause problems such as pain in the legs, disturbance of function in the stomach and bowel, and poor bladder control. See your healthcare team if these problems occur.

The link between type 2 diabetes and smoking

Research reported in the US National Institutes of Health publication *PubMed* in 2007 found smoking was associated with an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. See www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed.

If you smoke and you're struggling to give it up, there are a number of options available to help you, including counseling, patches, and medications. Speak to your doctor or call Quitline on 0800 778 778 or visit www.quit.org.nz.

Taking an active role in managing your diabetes lowers your risk of complications.

This information on diabetes complications is general and is not a complete guide. Always seek expert medical advice from your doctor.

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