



# Type 1 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas stops making insulin, specifically the cells that make the main hormone that regulates blood sugar. Type 1 diabetes needs careful management. Diabetes Physician Dr Rinki Murphy provides advice for those with type 1 in one of three videos on 'diabetes management' and a summary follows.

## How is type 1 diabetes diagnosed?

People with type 1 diabetes generally present quite acutely with symptoms of high blood sugar levels such as blurred vision, being thirsty, getting up at night to go to the toilet to pass urine more often (day and night) and some people present very rapidly and are quite unwell - vomiting, abdominal pain - and need to be hospitalised. Usually those symptoms increase and are present about three months before someone is diagnosed. But they can be even shorter or longer than that.

Type 1 diabetes is most common in childhood but the age at which people can present can be up to the very elderly and as young as six months of age.

## What happens if I don't control my blood sugar levels?

The long term implications of poorly controlled diabetes affects the organs that are most sensitive to small blood vessel damage such as the eyes can lead to vision loss and in the case of the kidneys it can lead to kidney failure. In the case of damage to blood vessels supplying the feet, this can affect the nerves and cause numbness, injury, ulceration and infections that are hard to treat and sometimes result in amputations. So those are the long-term complications associated with poorly controlled diabetes.

Damage can be done to those organs gradually, without people realising. Sometimes people can get very unwell when their blood sugar levels get extremely high. So it is wise to

do something about monitoring blood sugar levels and take steps to reduce those levels back into the normal range even when people don't feel unwell.

## Do you have to follow a special diet if you have type 1 diabetes?

People with type 1 diabetes are generally advised to follow a healthy diet and activity plan.

In my opinion people with type 1 diabetes do have a lot more freedom to eat what they would like. Their food choices can be varied and particularly for people who are diagnosed younger in life there is the opportunity to use insulin in a way the body normally makes it and replace insulin for foods that are high in sugar. And that freedom of eating is possible for people with type 1 diabetes.

However if people have developed other complications they may be advised to make changes in their diet such that they have a better outcome in terms of heart disease and other complication risks.

## Is it possible to cure type 1 diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes is able to be treated by pancreas transplants in a small number of people. I would not call that a cure, but a remission of type 1 diabetes. In New Zealand, people with type 1 diabetes who are usually eligible for pancreas transplants also have kidney failure so transplanting the two organs is a better choice for treatment.



Diabetes New Zealand is a leading national organisation and registered charity. Our aim is to support all people affected by diabetes to live well through: Providing information and support to help people take charge of their health • Acting as an advocate and representing all people with, or at risk of developing, diabetes • Raising awareness of diabetes, especially around lifestyle factors that can help prevent or delay type 2 and help manage and control type 1 and type 2.