

Managing type-two diabetes – an integrated team approach

Research shows that chronic illness such as diabetes is more effectively managed when health professionals and patients work together as partners to identify options and potential barriers to treatment. This partnership can empower the patient to understand their condition, participate in their care planning, monitor their symptoms and engage in activities that promote and protect their health.

As with many other chronic illnesses, effective management of diabetes requires an integrated team approach with input and collaboration from a variety of health care professionals including General Practitioners, Diabetes Educators, Dietitians, Podiatrists, and others. This approach allows all the health care professionals involved in your care to work together and with you to enable you to manage your diabetes in the best possible way. Your GP can help to monitor and treat the medical aspects to your condition, your diabetes educator will help you interpret and give meaning to your blood glucose levels and medications. Your podiatrist can help you prevent and treat diabetic foot complications, and your Dietitian can help you with individualised nutritional therapy for optimum blood glucose control.

Government Support

A Commonwealth Government initiative, the Enhanced Primary Care (EPC) programme, entitles a person with a chronic illness to a total of five Medicare rebated visits to approved allied health professionals (dietitians, diabetes educators, podiatrists and psychologists) in a calendar year. To be eligible for the EPC Medicare rebates you must have a current care plan coordinated by your GP.

Prevalence of type-two diabetes

The Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study 1999-2000 (AUSDIAB) found that the national diabetes prevalence rate was 7.5 % (940,000 Australians). It is also estimated that for every person diagnosed there is another person undiagnosed, this means that the prevalence may double to nearly 2 million Australians!

Causes of type-two diabetes

Type-two diabetes results from impaired insulin secretion or impaired insulin action or both. The pancreas produces and secretes insulin in response to carbohydrate intake. Our bodies convert the carbohydrates we eat to glucose, which is our main fuel source. Insulin acts like a key on our cells surfaces to unlock the cell door and allow glucose in to provide the energy needed for proper cellular function.

People who are overweight, physically inactive, smoke, have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and have a family history of type-two diabetes are at risk of developing insulin resistance. 'Insulin resistance' occurs when the insulin secreted by the pancreas cannot be used to unlock the doors for glucose transport into the cells. This results in high Blood Glucose Levels

(BGLs). This is also called 'pre-diabetes' and can lead to type-two diabetes if left untreated.

Consequences and complications of poorly controlled type-two diabetes

Poorly controlled diabetes increases your risk for developing complications including: heart disease, blindness, nerve damage, kidney disease, stroke and damage to blood vessels in legs, which can result in limb amputations.

Nutritional Management of Diabetes

It is recommended that people with diabetes follow a general healthy eating plan by choosing low fat foods, particularly foods low in saturated fats, including lean meats and fat reduced dairy, aiming for 5 serves of vegetables and 2 serves of fruit per day, and ensuring adequate hydration. Carbohydrates should be spread evenly throughout the day and choosing low Glycaemic Index (GI) carbohydrates will assist in keeping BGLs stable.

The GI is a system of ranking carbohydrates according to their effect on BGLs. A high GI food will result in a fast, high rise in BGL, whereas low GI foods will result in a slower, lower BGL response.

Other lifestyle factors such as the amount of physical activity, smoking, stress and alcohol consumption affect BGLs. For optimum diabetes management, all lifestyle factors should be considered as part of an integrated care plan.

Your GP, dietitian, diabetes educator and other appropriate health professionals can develop a tailored care plan for you, to enable you to take control of your diabetes.

Useful websites:

www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

www.glycemicindex.com

www.healthinsite.gov.au