



# info Prescription

## Information prescription

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### Diabetes – questions and answers

#### Just diagnosed

##### What does this mean for me?

Diabetes is a condition in which the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body cannot use it properly.

You may have to make different food choices, become more active and lose weight, if you need to, as well as attend more doctor's appointments and you may need to monitor your glucose levels at home.

By keeping your blood glucose levels, blood pressure and blood fat levels to as near normal as possible can help you to live a full and active life.

##### What is diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus is a condition in which the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body cannot use it properly. There are two main types of diabetes. These are: Type 1 diabetes and Type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes develops when the body can still make some insulin, but not enough, or when the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance). Type 2 diabetes is the more common of the two main types and accounts for between 85 - 95% of all people with diabetes.

##### What causes diabetes?

Diabetes is caused by many factors, some of which you could not have done anything about, for example, your genetic makeup, your age, or if you have previously had gestational diabetes. Certain lifestyle factors, such as being overweight, eating a poor diet, or taking little exercise can increase a person's risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

##### How will being diagnosed with diabetes change my life?

Everyone is individual but you may have to attend more hospital or GP appointments. You will probably need to make different food choices, become more active, and lose some weight if you need to. You may be testing your own glucose levels at home and write them down. You might also be asked to take certain medications by your doctor.

##### What should I do now?

It is important that you, in partnership with your diabetes team, put together a treatment plan that works for you. Learning about your condition and talking to others will help you to learn to take control.

The best way to help yourself is to be aware of what your blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure readings are, take any medication that you have been prescribed to treat any of these, attend all of your healthcare appointments, lose weight if you need to or maintain your current weight if it's within the recommended range for your height, eat healthily most of the time, stop smoking if you do, don't drink more than the recommended levels of alcohol and be as active as you can be. Doing all of these things, will help to reduce the risk of developing the complications of diabetes.

### **How is diabetes treated?**

Being diagnosed with diabetes means looking after your health has become even more important. People with diabetes often need additional treatments to making lifestyle changes such as medication to control their diabetes, blood pressure and blood fats.

### **Will I need to test my blood glucose levels?**

Home blood glucose testing gives an accurate picture of your blood glucose level at the time of the test. It involves pricking the side of your finger (as opposed to the pad) with a finger-pricking device and putting a drop of blood on a testing strip. A meter will read the result automatically. Keep a diary of your results to help you and your healthcare team work out whether your treatment needs to be adjusted.

### **What should my blood glucose levels be?**

Aim for blood glucose levels of 4-6 millimoles per litre (mmol/l) before meals and at no higher than 10 millimoles per litre (mmol/l) two hours after meals. Occasional blood glucose levels higher than this does not cause concern, but if your blood glucose levels are often higher, then discuss this with your diabetes team. Always take your test results with you to show them. Evidence shows that by sticking within these targets you can help to reduce the risk of long term complications associated with diabetes.

### **What can I eat?**

You can eat all foods. Follow a healthy balanced diet, one that is low in fat, salt and sugar, with regular carbohydrate and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Balancing your diet when you are diagnosed with diabetes can be challenging. Although the food choices you make and your eating habits are important in helping you manage your diabetes, you should be able to continue enjoying a wide variety of foods as part of healthy eating.

### **Why is activity so important?**

Being active is good for all of us but is especially important for people with diabetes. Physical activity, combined with healthy eating and any diabetes medication that you might be taking, will help you to manage your diabetes and prevent long-term diabetes complications.

### **How much activity should I be doing?**

Every form of physical activity counts, including housework or washing the car. The recommended minimum amount of activity for adults is 30 minutes on at least five days of the week (that's only 2.5 hours out of a 168 hour week). We are all recommended to

achieve at least 10,000 steps a day. It's important to find something that is enjoyable and achievable for you. Any increase in the amount of physical activity you do will help to control your diabetes.

### **Should I give up smoking?**

Smoking can make it more likely that you will develop neuropathy (nerve damage), nephropathy (kidney damage) and retinopathy (eye damage) and will increase the likelihood of heart disease. Giving up smoking is one of the most beneficial things you can do for your future health.

### **Where can I get emotional support?**

One of the most difficult things to come to terms with is that diabetes is for life. In the weeks and months after being diagnosed with diabetes emotions are often pushed to one side as you try to get to grips with new treatments and changing your lifestyle. Everyone reacts differently when they hear the news that they have diabetes. You may be initially overwhelmed, shocked, afraid, angry and anxious. Over time it is likely that, as you take more control, you will become more confident in your ability to cope with everyday activities and the initial turmoil you may have felt should start to fade. Your healthcare team is there to give you emotional support, reassurance and help you to build your confidence in coping with diabetes. You can also get a lot of support and encouragement from other people with diabetes - Diabetes UK voluntary groups and Care Support Events gives you the chance to hear how others cope in similar situations.

### **If I drive, do I need to notify the DVLA now I have been diagnosed with diabetes?**

If you have diabetes that is treated with insulin, you must, by law, inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) as soon as possible after you have been diagnosed.

### **What happens if my blood glucose goes too low?**

Often you can experience 'warning signs', which occur as the body tries to raise the blood glucose level. These 'warning signs' vary from person to person but often include feeling shaky, sweating, tingling in the lips, going pale, heart pounding, confusion and irritability.

### **Why do blood glucose levels fall?**

A hypo may occur if you have taken too much diabetes medication, delayed or missed a meal or snack, not eaten enough carbohydrate, taken part in unplanned or more strenuous exercise than usual, and have been drinking alcohol without food. Sometimes there is no obvious cause.

### **How should I treat a "hypo"?**

Treatment is usually very simple and requires taking some fast acting carbohydrate, such as a sugary drink or some glucose tablets, and following this up with some longer acting carbohydrate, such as a cereal bar, a sandwich, piece of fruit, biscuits and milk or the next meal if it is due. If left untreated the person will, eventually, become unconscious and will need to be treated with an injection of glucagon (a hormone that raises blood glucose levels).

### **What are the possible long term effects of diabetes?**

The possible long term complications of diabetes include:

- Cardiovascular disease: This is damage to the heart and blood circulation caused by fatty deposits on the linings of blood vessels around the body.
- Retinopathy: This is the most common cause of blindness among people aged 16 and 64 in the UK as it affects the blood vessels supplying the retina – the seeing part of the eye.
- Neuropathy: This is also known as nerve damage. There are many different types of neuropathy depending on which nerve has been damaged. Sensory neuropathy is the most common type of neuropathy and mainly affects the nerves in the feet and the legs.
- Nephropathy: This is also known as kidney or renal disease.

### **How can I prevent the long term complications associated with diabetes?**

The good news is that by keeping your blood glucose, blood cholesterol and blood pressure levels to as near normal as possible the risks of the long term complications can be significantly reduced. It is also important to have your eyes screened and feet checked at least once a year so that any problems can be picked up early and treated appropriately.

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### **Help with translation**

If you need support in your own language contact CITAS on 0845 521 0405. CITAS are a non-profit making organisation that provides interpreting and translation services in over 55 languages to local people accessing health, social services, housing legal and education services.

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### **Help from Diabetes UK**

Over 2 million people in the UK are diagnosed with Diabetes and a further 750,000 have the condition, but do not know it yet.

Diabetes UK is the largest organization in the UK working for people with diabetes, funding research, campaigning and helping people live with the condition.

With over 170,000 members Diabetes UK is the charity for people with diabetes, their friends and carers. Our mission is to improve the lives of people with the condition and to work towards a future without diabetes by providing practical support, information and safety-net services to help people manage their diabetes.

### **Careline**

The Careline is staffed by trained counsellors who can provide a listening ear and the time to talk things through.

0845 120 2960, Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm

(BT calls from landlines should cost no more than 4p per minute; calls from other providers and mobiles may vary. Alternatively, call 020 7424 1000 and ask Reception to transfer your call to the Careline.)

### **Website**

[www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)

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### **What is an information prescription?**

An Information Prescription is a handout which is being given to people with long-term conditions by their doctor, nurse or pharmacist to help and support them manage their own health condition.

This handout tells you where you can find more information and support, including a telephone helpline, where a knowledgeable and friendly person can give you more support and assistance. The handout also gives you details of this website, where you can find more information which will help you to control of your condition.

### **About us**

We are a partnership of [Arthritis Care](#), [Asthma UK](#), and [Diabetes UK](#) working with [Hammersmith and Fulham PCT](#).

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