



info Prescription

Information prescription

Diabetes – questions and answers

Ongoing care of type 2 diabetes

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.

Why do I need an annual review?

Your annual review can be compared to an MOT for a car. It is performed to establish how well your diabetes is controlled and to pick up any early signs of the long term complications of diabetes, so that they can be treated appropriately.

What is it that happens during an annual review?

- Your weight should be recorded to make sure you're a healthy weight for your height
- Your urine should be tested for protein, to see how well your kidneys are working
- Your blood should be tested to measure long-term diabetes control (HbA1c)
- You should discuss your diabetes control, including your home monitoring results, which you should bring with you.
- Your blood pressure should be checked
- Your vision should be checked and the back of your eyes examined. A digital photo should be taken of the back of your eyes and, if necessary, you should be referred to an ophthalmologist. Your doctor can arrange this for you. It is unlikely to happen at a different time and place to your annual review.
- Your legs and feet should be examined to check your circulation and nerve supply, and if necessary, you should be referred to a registered podiatrist/chiropodist
- You should have the opportunity to discuss how you are coping at work and at home
- You should have the opportunity to review your diet with a nurse or registered dietitian
- Your blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides) should be tested

- Your injection sites should be examined if you are on insulin

What do the results of my blood tests mean?

Blood glucose control: HbA1c is a measure of your long term blood glucose control. The range to aim for should be below 6.5%

Blood fats: cholesterol and triglyceride levels are measure to get an overall picture of the amount and the types of fat in your blood. The aims are

Total cholesterol: less than 4mmol/l

Triglycerides less than 1.7mmol/l

LDL (bad) cholesterol less than 2mmol/l

HDL (good) cholesterol more than 1mmol/l for men and 1.2mmol/l for women

My diabetes team talk about “self-care”. What does this mean?

Looking after your health when you have diabetes is crucial to preventing some of the complications associated with diabetes. This involves knowing your blood glucose, blood pressure and blood fat levels as well as the condition of your feet and getting your eyes screened for retinopathy. It's also about eating well; being active; stopping smoking if you smoke; losing weight if you're overweight or maintaining your weight if you're already within the recommended weight range for your height.

Self-care may also mean monitoring your blood glucose levels. Knowing the level of glucose in your blood is useful for when you are trying to control your diabetes. It can help to maintain day to day control, detect hypoglycaemia, assess control during any illness, and helps to provide information that can be used in the prevention of long term complications

Can I get access to my written results of tests and investigations?

Yes, all results and correspondence written about you should be available on request.

Do I get free prescriptions/eye tests/glasses/dental treatment etc?

People who treat their diabetes with tablets or insulin are entitled to free prescriptions, and everyone with diabetes is entitled to free NHS sight tests. Having diabetes does not automatically qualify someone for free dental treatment. For more information about healthcare entitlements see leaflet HC11, Are you entitled to help with health costs? Available from the Department of Health literature line on: 0800 555777.

E-mail: doh@prolog.uk.com

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.

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.

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.

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. Some people go through a stage very similar to mourning - as though they are grieving for lost health. Some people hide these feelings but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are coping without difficulty. Over time it is likely that 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. If you, your family, or friends are concerned about any aspect of diabetes, your healthcare team would rather know about it. If the worry is groundless, then you can be reassured. If it has some cause then action can be taken. 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 change to hear how others cope in similar situations.

www.diabetes.org.uk/How_we_help/Support-events/

www.diabetes.org.uk/How_we_help/Careline/

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.

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

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](#).

We are funded by the Department of Health to develop and test Information Prescriptions, informing the implementation of Information Prescriptions throughout the country.

© 2007 Arthritis Care (reg charity no 206563), Asthma UK (802364), Diabetes UK (215199), Hammersmith and Fulham Primary Care Trust