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Understanding Diabetes

Your Guide to Prevention & Living Well



Whether you've been diagnosed, told you're at risk, or simply want to understand more, this guide is here to help.

Diabetes is one of the UK's most common long-term conditions, and its prevalence is growing. But it's also one of the most manageable, and in many cases, preventable.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a long-term condition where blood sugar (glucose) levels remain persistently high.

This happens when the body either doesn't produce enough insulin; the hormone that moves sugar from the blood into our cells for energy, or can no longer use it effectively.

Over time, persistently high blood sugar causes damage to blood vessels and nerves, increasing the risk of serious complications.

Type 1 vs Type 2

Understanding the different types

Type 1 diabetes

- An autoimmune condition.
- The immune system attacks the pancreas (the organ that produces insulin).
- The pancreas are damaged and cannot secrete insulin.
- As there is no insulin circulating in the body the treatment is lifelong insulin.
- It is usually diagnosed at a younger age.

Type 2 diabetes

- Accounts for approximately 90% of all cases in the UK.
- Linked to increased insulin resistance paired with reduced amounts being released from the pancreas (there is some insulin in the body but it is not being used effectively).
- Can be more common in certain ethnicities, coupled with lifestyle factors.
- It is managed with a combination of dietary and lifestyle changes, prescribed tablets or if this isn't working, insulin.



Risk Factors

Some risk factors for type 2 diabetes are within your control – and knowing them is the first step.

- Family history
- Overweight/obese body weight– especially if weight is distributed around the waist.
- Increased risk among certain ethnic backgrounds.
- Poor diet.
- Physical inactivity.
- Increasing age.
- Poor sleep, stress or shift work.
- Polycystic ovaries (PCOS/ PMOS).
- Certain drug treatments – steroids, beta blockers, statins.

If you're unsure of your risk, a GP can help you assess it quickly and confidentially.



Symptoms to watch for

Don't ignore the warning signs

Many people live with undiagnosed diabetes for years. Catching it early makes a significant difference. Look out for:

Excessive thirst

Frequent urination

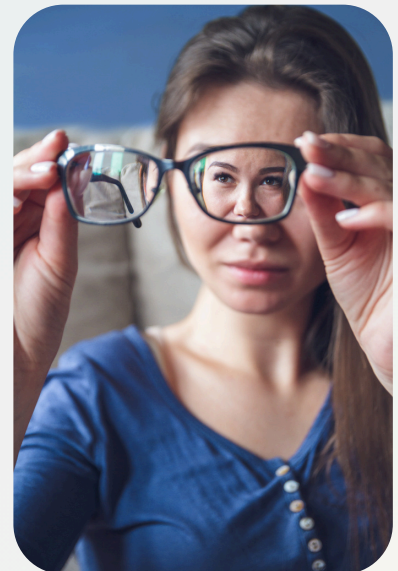
Unexplained fatigue

Blurred vision

Slow wound healing

Unexplained weight loss

Recurrent infections



If you recognise any of these symptoms, speaking to a GP early is key to avoiding long-term complications.

Prevention is within your control

Type 2 diabetes is largely preventable. Small, consistent lifestyle changes can reduce your risk significantly - and if you've been told you're pre-diabetic, acting now can stop progression to a full diagnosis.

Finding out your blood sugar is in the pre-diabetic range is a crucial moment. Making lifestyle changes now can halt the progression entirely.

Here's where to start:

- Increase regular physical activity — even a daily 30-minute walk helps.
- Aim for a healthy weight, especially around the waist.
- Eat a balanced diet rich in fibre, protein, and fresh food.
- Reduce processed foods, refined sugars, and alcohol.
- Prioritise sleep and manage stress
- Stop smoking.



Living well after diagnosis

A diabetes diagnosis is not the end of the story. With the right management, people with diabetes lead full, healthy lives.



Key to living well is

- **Monitoring** – keeping track of your blood sugar levels helps you understand how food, exercise, and medication affect you day to day.
- **Medication adherence** – if you've been prescribed medication, taking it consistently is essential, even when you feel well.
- **Attending routine reviews** – regular check-ups with your GP allow complications to be caught early and treatment to be adjusted.
- **Recognising warning signs** – know the difference between a hypo (low blood sugar: shaking, sweating, confusion, dizziness) and hyperglycaemia (high blood sugar: thirst, fatigue, headaches, blurred vision) and how to respond.

Common myths – and the truth



Sugar causes diabetes

Eating too much sugar doesn't cause type 1 diabetes as that's an autoimmune process.

Type 2 is a complex mix of genetics and lifestyle factors. BUT high sugar diets can lead to weight gain, which is a risk factor for diabetes.



People with diabetes can't eat sugar or sweets

Taken in moderation, diabetics can have sugar in the diet.

The key is to get the body to process it (increasing insulin in Type 1, taking exercise after sugar consumption in Type 2)



Diabetics need to eat special foods

Foods labelled as for diabetics offer no real benefit. Focus on freshly prepared food that is high in protein and fibre.



Only overweight people get Diabetes

Excess body weight is a major risk factor for T2 Diabetes but people of all body types can be diagnosed. T1 is unrelated to weight or lifestyle.



Pre-diabetes isn't a big deal

Finding out that your blood sugar level is in the prediabetic range is a crucial time - make the necessary lifestyle changes now to halt the progression to Diabetes.



Type 2 Diabetes is 'mild' compared to Type 1

Left untreated, both types 1 and 2 can make the kidneys fail, lead to blindness, cause nerve issues and increase your risk of heart attack or stroke



Once blood sugar is controlled, you can stop medication

Some people with type 2 diabetes manage the condition through diet and exercise and do not need to be prescribed medication from the GP.

However, if you are prescribed medication which lowers your blood sugar levels then you tend to stay on medication. Some patients make such drastic lifestyle changes that they can put their Diabetes into remission. This is not a 'cure' and the lifestyle changes need to be maintained.

How can Doctor Care Anywhere help



24/7 GP and ACP Appointments

- Same-day virtual consultations.
- Instant access to medical advice, prescriptions, and fit notes.
- Available anytime, from home, the office, or on the go.



Mental Health Services

- Confidential sessions with mental health practitioners.
- Early intervention for anxiety, stress, and low mood.
- Assessment, treatment and support, including access to therapy and digital health tools.



Tailored Physiotherapy Support

- Virtual assessments and recovery plans for musculoskeletal concerns.
- Clinician-led support for pain, injuries, and posture-related issues.
- Expert assessment, diagnosis and treatment plans to aid recovery and prevent long-term issues.