

# WHAT IS DIABETES?

**Diabetes is a condition which occurs when your body cannot use blood glucose properly. Our bodies use glucose in the blood for energy. Blood glucose levels go up when we eat any food or drink that contains carbohydrate such as chapatti, rice, bread, potatoes, pasta, biscuits, sweets, fizzy drinks and fruit juice.**

When you have diabetes, your blood glucose levels stay up because your body cannot use glucose properly for the energy it needs. If this is not corrected, it can lead to complications that can make you go blind, have a heart attack or stroke, or even have an amputation.

## WHAT NEXT?

Diabetes cannot be cured, but you can keep it under control.

You need to speak to your doctor or nurse to get your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol down to normal. This may involve taking medication but you also need to make changes to your eating and exercise more.

## WHAT FOODS CAN I EAT?

- Reduce the amount of food you eat, for example don't have chapatti, naan (or other flat breads) and rice together, have one or the other.
- Eat more vegetables (such as aubergine, carrots), fruit, beans and dhal.
- Eat more fish (at least twice a week) and less meat.
- Eat less fat. Change lard and ghee for vegetable and olive oil, but use less of it.
- Cut down on biscuits, chocolate, crisps, Bombay mix and other snacks high in fat and sugar.
- Use peppers, herbs and spices for flavour instead of salt.
- Use skimmed or semi-skimmed milk instead of full-fat milk.
- Drink more water instead of sugary drinks such as energy drinks, fizzy drinks, milk shakes and fruit juices.

## THINGS YOU CAN GO TO YOUR GP FOR

- Your doctor and nurse will speak to you about how to get your blood glucose levels down.
- If you are not happy with your diabetes control.
- If you are struggling to cope with managing your diabetes.
- If you have any side effects from your medication.
- A referral to see a dietitian to help you change your eating and to exercise more.
- Information about diabetes group education in your area.
- Regular blood tests, blood pressure and feet checks.
- Referral to see a specialist to check your eyes, at least once a year.

## HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

- Attend all your appointments.
- Take your medication as prescribed.
- Check your feet every day for any loss of sensation and changes in colour or shape.
- Do more exercise, such as start walking more, and build that up over time. Try to sit less.
- Change your eating habits.
- Get your winter flu jab.
- Get help to lose any excess weight.
- If you smoke – stop.

## HOW DO I KNOW MY BLOOD GLUCOSE LEVELS ARE HIGH?

If your blood glucose levels are high, it can be difficult to tell, which is why you need regular checks from your GP. In some cases you may have some of the following symptoms:

- urinating more, especially at night
- feeling more thirsty than usual
- feeling tired
- losing weight without trying
- cuts and wounds taking more time to heal.

If you have any of these symptoms, or suspect any changes to your health, speak to your doctor or nurse.

## CAN ANY TRADITIONAL MEDICINE HELP?

There is no strong evidence that traditional medicine and preparations can help manage diabetes. Some of these preparations can affect the way your diabetes medication works, and some can even make diabetes complications worse. Therefore, it is really important to tell your doctor or nurse if you are taking any traditional medicine. It is not safe to replace your prescribed medicine with traditional preparations.

## WHAT CAN DIABETES UK DO FOR ME?

If you want to talk to someone about your diabetes, if you're worried, or if you have any questions, call our Careline on **0345 123 2399\***. We have trained counsellors who can offer you support, advice and practical information to help you manage your diabetes well. We also have people to interpret for you if you don't want to speak in English.

If you want more information in different languages on food and what you can do, ask for a copy of the *Enjoy Food South Asian* booklet when you call Careline.

If you want to know more about the care you should receive, download our 15 Healthcare Essentials in different languages by going to **[www.diabetes.org.uk/other\\_languages](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/other_languages)**