

**T**he rise in the number of people with diabetes is worrying — especially when we're told by Diabetes UK that a further half million people have the condition but aren't aware of it. The growing number of overweight people in the UK is a big factor in the recent growth in numbers, with our increasingly sedentary lifestyles also to blame. "Scandinavian studies found that by making a number of lifestyle and diet changes, it's possible to at least halve your risk of getting type 2 diabetes (*see below*) or even eliminate it altogether," says Dr Melanie Davies, Professor of Diabetes Medicine at University Hospitals of Leicester.

## 7 ways to slash your risk

Advice from diabetes experts, **Natasha Marshland, care adviser and dietician at Diabetes UK, and Dr Melanie Davies, Professor of Diabetic Medicine.**

**1 Lose some weight.** Some 80 per cent of diabetics are overweight at diagnosis. Losing just five per cent of your body weight will help a great deal to reduce your risk.

**2 Watch what you eat and drink.** Check your portion sizes, as well as what you're eating. Alcohol contains a lot of calories, too, especially if you're drinking at home when glass sizes tend to be larger.

**3 Eat more fibre.** Studies have shown that eating 15g of fibre per 1,000 calories helps to keep your weight down. For example, a pear contains 3.5g; half a can of baked beans, 7.4g; two slices of brown bread, 3.5g, and a bowl of muesli, 3.4g.

**4 Check food labels before you buy.** You can find a lot of information about just how much fat, salt and calories foods contain.

**5 Get more active.** Exercise makes your body's insulin more effective, raises your metabolic rate and helps lower blood glucose. Aim for 20-30 minutes, five days a week, and work hard enough to be slightly out of breath.



**6 Cut down on fats.** Fat acts as a barrier to insulin, making it less effective.

# Diabetes: Could you be at risk?

There are now 2.5 million people living with diabetes in Britain, but there's plenty we can do to avoid becoming one of them. Sarah Purcell reports

If you have increased thirst, you may need to see your GP

**7 Stop smoking.** Although it doesn't cause diabetes, people who smoke do tend to lead healthier lifestyles and this increases their risk of developing diabetes in the first place. Smokers who have diabetes are at higher risk of complications, such as heart disease.

## Do you need a diabetes test?

Untreated diabetes can cause serious health problems, including heart disease, blindness and kidney failure. "Because 50 per

cent of people have no warning signs of diabetes, it's important to have a test if you could be risk," says Professor Davies. You can have the blood test for diabetes at your doctor's surgery or your local pharmacy.

## You're at increased risk if...

- You have diabetes in your family, especially a parent or sibling.
- You're over 40 and overweight (or over 25 if black or South Asian).
- You have a large waist measurement: 37in or more for men (except South Asian, when it's

## 'If you're sensible, diabetes doesn't have to change your life'



**Jackie Herbert, 57, from Newton Ferrers, Devon, was diagnosed with diabetes five years ago.**

'I started needing to go to the loo during the night, but put this down to the menopause at first. Then we went on holiday and it got worse. I also had this tremendous thirst — I'd get through five litres of water in a couple of days. But I still hadn't equated these symptoms with diabetes.'

I had to see my GP because of a knee problem and, as an aside, I mentioned these symptoms. They did a blood test and my blood-sugar level was 15mmol/l (a normal level should be between 4 and 7 mmol/l). Diabetes was immediately diagnosed.

At 16st, I was overweight, but I had two lively dogs who I walked twice a day and I've always eaten healthily. And there's no family history of diabetes.

When I was first diagnosed, I managed to lose 2st in six months by cutting down on snacks, fats and luxury foods, and I went for longer walks with the dogs.

It took five months to get my diabetes well controlled — and my blood sugar is down to 5mmol.

I'm on metformin to control my diabetes and statins, and aspirin to protect me from heart disease. I've had no health complications, but I find that the more exercise I do, the better controlled it is and the lower my blood-sugar level is. I have an excellent GP practice, too, which has helped.

I've accepted I have diabetes. If you're sensible, do as your doctor tells you and are informed about it, it doesn't have to change your life. I can carry on with all the things that I used to do.'

### Early warnings

**If you notice any of these, have a diabetes test:**

- Increased thirst. ● Needing to wee more often, especially at night.
- Feeling very tired. ● Slight, unexplained weight loss.
- Recurrent thrush or skin infections. ● Blurred vision.

### Diabetes: The two types

**Type 1** tends to be genetic and affects younger people, with symptoms developing quickly over several weeks. Very little or no insulin is produced by the pancreas, so these diabetics need to control their condition with injected insulin daily.

**Type 2** doesn't always run in families and tends to affect older people. It can often be controlled without insulin injections. The pancreas produces insulin, but the body cells become resistant to it.

- "It's most important when you're diagnosed to get yourself referred to a diabetes education programme, where you'll be helped to manage your disease," says Professor Davies.
- "See a dietician for advice on the changes you need to make and follow what you're told to do," says Natasha Marshland.
- Take more exercise if you can. This will help you to lose weight, if

you need to, and help control your blood-sugar levels.

- Have regular sight tests to check for diabetic retinopathy, the main cause of blindness in Britain. This should be done once a year by your optician.
- Take your medication correctly.
- Stop smoking to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Ask your GP if you should take daily aspirin to prevent heart disease — a recent Scottish study suggested it shouldn't be routinely taken by diabetics.

### More information

- **Diabetes UK Careline:** 0845 120 2960; [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)
- **The Desmond Project:** 0116 258 7757; [www.desmond-project.org.uk](http://www.desmond-project.org.uk)
- **NHS (National Diabetes Support Team):** 0116 295 2045/2080; [www.diabetes.nhs.uk](http://www.diabetes.nhs.uk)



- 35in or more); 31.5in or more for all women.
- You have raised blood pressure.
- You have had a heart attack or stroke.
- You have polycystic ovaries and are overweight.
- You had diabetes in pregnancy.
- You have high cholesterol.
- You've been told you have a high level of glucose in your blood.

### If you do have diabetes...

There is plenty you can do to ensure diabetes doesn't affect your quality of life or your health.