

HEALTH WATCH

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Did you know that –

Type 2, or “age onset” DIABETES, the diabetes most likely to affect you and your family, is brought about by lifestyle choices and can be avoided and even reversed?

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that diabetes is becoming a global epidemic. In 2005 over 170 million people suffered from this disease and the estimates are that over 360 million will be afflicted by 2030 - an increase of over 110%. What's even more frightening, researchers believe that for every person diagnosed there will be two more in a “pre –diabetes” state, resulting in more than 1 trillion sufferers worldwide!¹ In South Africa it's estimated that $\pm 40\%$ of women are overweight, raising the fear that possibly 2 out of every 3 women will be diabetic by 2025.²

Conventional medical solutions for diabetes are often not all that good for your long term health. There has been considerable controversy over the drugs used to *control* (NB not cure!) diabetes. The popular drug Avandia was found to be potentially lethal (the company manufacturing it was shown to have deliberately falsified the research to show that the drug is safe³), Actos has been implicated in increasing women's chances of breaking bones and causing cancer and Metformin's side effects are frightening (they include gastrointestinal disturbances, increased risk of heart attack, vitamin B12 deficiency and a potentially fatal condition known as lactic acidosis).

So what is the alternative?

Let's start by looking at what Type 2 Diabetes is, because if we understand what it is and how it happens, we are better able to understand how to prevent it. Simply put, diabetes occurs when we have an excess of sugar in our blood. Excess sugar in the blood is very toxic in large amounts, it's corrosive to arteries and veins, brain cells, kidneys and your eyes. It also feeds infections, cancers and promotes blood clots (it's estimated that $\pm 80\%$ of diabetics die from cardiovascular disease!⁴)

This excess sugar in the blood comes primarily from what we eat. A diet high in refined carbohydrates, white sugar, white flour & white rice (breads, pastas, breakfast cereals, cakes, sweets, fizzy cooldrinks, etc.) causes the blood sugar to rise rapidly. To counter this (to protect your arteries, veins, eyes, etc.) the body produces hormones to neutralize the sugar, the chief hormone being insulin, made by the pancreas. After years of having to produce massive amounts of insulin many times a day, the pancreas simply cannot cope anymore and produces less and less insulin, causing diabetes.

Another factor that comes into play is that of insulin resistance. After years of having to contend with massive amounts of insulin on a daily basis, the cells become resistant to it, resulting in less being assimilated into the cells when the pancreas does produce insulin. Being overweight aggravates the process and there is a very strong link between obesity and diabetes. The current theory is that fat stores release proteins and fatty acids which interfere with the body's capacity to store glucose (sugar).⁵

It is obvious from the above that diet (an unhealthy diet) and excess weight are the main causes of Type 2 Diabetes. Type 2 Diabetes used to be an old peoples disease, however today there are numerous cases of children getting it. This has been attributed almost exclusively to bad diet and obesity.

The exciting news is that you do not have to suffer from diabetes. ***By making simple lifestyle choices you can prevent it***, and if you have it, these same lifestyle choices can control and even reverse the disease!

There is overwhelming scientific evidence showing that diabetes need not cause the problems it does in the world's population. For example, in 2005, results from a three year study at the George Washington University, Washington D.C., showed that lifestyle changes were more than twice as effective as taking Metformin.⁶

In another study, overweight and obese subjects with diabetes and insulin resistance were put on a controlled diet, combined with a daily exercise regime. The results showed a 50% reversal of diabetes and insulin resistance after only three weeks.⁷

The first step in preventing, or controlling, diabetes is to ensure that you are not overweight. An easy way to check this is by calculating your Body Mass Index (BMI), measured as your weight in kg ÷ your height in metres². For example, if you are 1,8m tall and weigh 80kg your BMI is $80 \div 1.8^2 = 24.7$, you are bordering on being overweight!

- Underweight = <18.5
- Normal weight = 18.5-24.9
- Overweight = 25-29.9
- Obesity = BMI of 30 or greater

Secondly, sort out your diet.

- Try to eliminate, or at least cut down, anything white (white sugar, flour, rice, bread, etc.), carbonated drinks (colas, etc), red meats and fried, fast, processed and pre-packaged foods. Don't expect to do this all in one go, rather cut back gradually. For example, if you usually have 3 teaspoons of sugar in your coffee, start taking 2½ for a week, then 2, and so on. You'll not notice the difference and slowly your taste buds will be re-educated. Ultimately you'll be happy with no sugar.
- Cut down your consumption of alcohol, caffeine, salt, fats and dairy products.
- Increase your consumption of fish (grilled, not fried), fruits, vegetables (preferably raw, otherwise lightly steamed), nuts, whole grains and pulses.
- Increase the amount of water you drink. You should have at least 8 glasses of good quality water every day. This will help your body to flush away toxins and pollutants instead of storing them.
- Avoid food additives such as preservatives, colourants and flavourants. Become a label reader.
- Eat five small meals every day instead of two or three large ones. Eating smaller meals more often helps to maintain stable blood sugar levels throughout the day.

Some specifics

- Change to a low GI (glycemic index) diet. Low GI foods include oats, whole grains, brown rice, chickpeas, lentils, pears, plums, apples, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, mushrooms, green beans, leafy green vegetables, and tomatoes.
- Increase your daily fibre intake. Fibre helps to absorb sugar and prevents it from getting into the bloodstream.
- Try to combine protein with complex carbohydrates (unrefined carbohydrates like whole grains) in each meal. This helps stabilize blood sugar levels.
- Eat a teaspoon of cinnamon every day. Cinnamon contains an ingredient called MHCP which mimics insulin, improving glucose metabolism. Sprinkle it on oats, curries, fruit salads, etc. or mix it in honey and spread it on your toast.
- Take a multi vitamin/mineral supplement that includes chromium. Chromium increases your cells' sensitivity to insulin.
- Take an Omega 3 supplement daily. Omega 3 helps lower insulin resistance and is anti-inflammatory. NB it is not necessary to supplement Omega 6, we generally get more than enough in our normal diets. Omega 6 causes inflammation in the body.
- Make sure you get at least 8 hours sleep every night. Lack of sleep causes an increase in the levels of ghrelin, a hormone which increases appetite, and a decrease in the levels of leptin, a hormone that gives you a full feeling. The result is an increase in weight.

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Thirdly, increase your amount of daily exercise. Just a brisk half hour walk every day will make a huge difference. Use the stairs rather than the lift. Park at the furthest end of the car park from the entrance. Researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia showed that rats that had regular exercise increased their sensitivity to insulin. When they stopped the rats exercising, their insulin sensitivity decreased by one third in just 48 hours and continued to decrease as long as the rats were inactive. Insulin bonds with receptors in muscles and facilitates the transfer of blood sugar (glucose) to the muscles and other tissues. The more active you are the more effective this metabolic process is. Inactivity reduces the efficiency of this process, requiring greater amounts of insulin to remove the glucose from your bloodstream.

This is just a little of what we now know about preventing, and controlling, diabetes by means of lifestyle choices. There is an overwhelming body of scientific evidence today proving that diabetes need not be the scourge it has become and that medications are less effective **and more costly** than lifestyle changes. It makes sense to take control of your health (after all it is your greatest wealth), and not leave it in the hands of the medical profession. While there is a place for medical intervention, it's up to us to do whatever we can to maintain a healthy lifestyle and not expect the doctor to fix what should not be broken in the first place. If you are already on diabetes medication **do not stop** taking it without first discussing it with your doctor and informing him/her of the alternatives you propose. If, however, your doctor is not open to alternatives to drug therapy perhaps you should find a more enlightened one.

¹ "Chronic Disease – A Vital Investment", 2005, The World Health Organization Report

² See www.health24.com/dietnfood/General/15-742-775,29907.asp

³ See <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/HEALTH/02/20/avandia.study/?hpt=T1>

⁴ "Food is Better Medicine than Drugs" pg 133. Patrick Holford & Jerome Burne, 2006

⁵ Marx J. "Unravelling the Cause of Diabetes", Science, vol 296 (5568), 2002, pp. 686-9

⁶ Orchard T. *et al* "The Effect of Metformin & Intensive Lifestyle Intervention....." Annals of Internal Medicine, vol 142(8), 2005, pp. 16 – 19

⁷ Christian K. *et al* "Effect of a Short Term Diet and Exercise Intervention....." Journal of Applied Physiology, vol 100, 2006, pp. 1657 - 65

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