

# Type 2 Diabetes - A Summary

This leaflet gives a summary of Type 2 diabetes. There is a separate more detailed leaflet on Type 2 diabetes, and also a leaflet on Type 1 diabetes.

## What is diabetes and what causes Type 2 diabetes?

Diabetes occurs when the level of glucose (sugar) in the blood becomes too high. Normally, after we eat, various foods are broken down in the gut into sugars which are then absorbed into the body. The main sugar is called glucose. To remain healthy, your blood glucose level should not go too high or too low. A hormone called insulin helps to take glucose from the bloodstream into various cells of the body. This helps to keep the blood sugar normal.

Insulin is made by special cells in the pancreas. In Type 2 diabetes you either do not make enough insulin for your body's needs, and/or the cells in your body are not able to use the insulin properly. (The pancreas does not stop making insulin which occurs in Type 1 diabetes.) Type 2 diabetes usually first develops after the age of 40. It tends to run in families. It is more common in people who are overweight. It is also more common in African, Afro-Caribbean and Asian people.

## What are the symptoms of Type 2 diabetes?

Symptoms include: excess thirst, passing large amounts of urine, tiredness, weight loss, and feeling generally unwell. Symptoms tend to develop quite slowly, over weeks or months.

## Possible long term complications which may develop

Even a mildly raised glucose level which does not cause any symptoms in the short-term can affect the blood vessels in the long-term. This may lead to some complications (often years after diabetes is first diagnosed). These include: an increased risk of heart disease, stroke and poor circulation; eye and vision problems; kidney damage; nerve damage; serious foot problems; impotence. In general, the risk of developing complications is reduced if the blood glucose level is well controlled, and other risk factors such as high blood pressure are dealt with.

## What is the treatment for Type 2 diabetes?

### Treatment to keep your blood glucose level as near normal as possible

- Many people are treated by lifestyle measures alone. That is: eating a healthy diet, losing weight if you are overweight, and doing at least 30 minutes physical activity on most days such as a brisk walk, swimming, etc. You will normally be referred to a dietician who will give advice about a healthy diet and on how to lose weight if you are overweight.
- Medication is usually prescribed if lifestyle measures fail to control symptoms and/or the level of blood glucose. There are various tablets and different ones suit different people. Some people need a combination of tablets. Tablets do not work *instead* of a healthy lifestyle - you should aim to have a healthy lifestyle *as well*.
- Insulin injections are needed in some cases.

**Treatment to reduce the risk of complications.** Your blood pressure should be well controlled. Do not smoke. Also, most people with Type 2 diabetes take tablets to lower the blood cholesterol level and take a daily aspirin tablet.