



**DIABETES
THE FAQs**

JEWISH CARE

1. WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes is a lifelong condition that causes a person's blood sugar level to become too high.

About 3.1 million people in the UK have diabetes but many people either have not had diabetes diagnosed or have blood sugar levels above the normal range and are at increased risk of developing diabetes.

It's very important for diabetes to be diagnosed as early as possible because it will get progressively worse if untreated.

Diabetes can cause serious long-term health problems. It is the most common cause of visual impairment and blindness in people of working age. It is also responsible for most cases of kidney failure and lower limb amputation. People with diabetes are up to five times more likely to have cardiovascular disease and stroke than those without diabetes.

There are two main types of diabetes – type 1 diabetes and type 2 diabetes.

2. WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The main symptoms of diabetes are:

- Feeling very thirsty
- Urinating more frequently than usual, particularly at night
- Feeling very tired
- Weight loss and loss of muscle bulk
- Itching around the genitals, or frequent episodes of thrush
- Cuts or wounds that heal slowly
- Blurred vision

The symptoms of type 1 diabetes usually develop very quickly in young people (over a few days or weeks). In adults, the symptoms often take longer to develop (a few months).

Many people have type 2 diabetes for years without realising because the early symptoms tend to be general.

3. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

The amount of sugar in the blood is controlled by a hormone called insulin. If you have diabetes, your body is unable to break down glucose into energy. This is because there's either not enough insulin to move the glucose, or the insulin produced doesn't work properly.

TYPE 1 DIABETES

In type 1 diabetes, the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin. As no insulin is produced, your glucose levels increase, which can seriously damage the body's organs.

Type 1 diabetes usually develops before the age of 40, often during the teenage years.

Type 1 diabetes is less common than type 2 diabetes. In the UK, it affects about 10% of all adults with diabetes.

People with type 1 diabetes need insulin injections for the rest of their life and have to pay attention to their lifestyle and health to ensure their blood glucose levels stay balanced.

TYPE 2 DIABETES

Type 2 diabetes is where the body doesn't produce enough insulin, or the body's cells don't react to insulin.

Type 2 diabetes is far more common than type 1 diabetes. In the UK, around 90% of all adults with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. It is often associated with obesity.

People with type 2 diabetes may be able to control their symptoms simply by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and monitoring their blood glucose levels. However, as type 2 diabetes is a progressive condition, many eventually need medication, usually in the form of tablets.

How to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes:

- Eat healthily
- Loose weight (if you're overweight)
- Be physically active

GESTATIONAL DIABETES (DURING PREGNANCY)

Blood glucose levels can sometimes increase during pregnancy, making difficult for insulin to absorb it all. This affects about 5% of pregnant women. Gestational diabetes can increase the risk of health problems developing in an unborn baby, so it's important to keep your blood glucose levels under control. In most cases, gestational diabetes disappears after the baby is born. However, women who develop the condition have about a 30% risk of developing type 2 diabetes in later life.

4. WHAT ARE THE HEALTH PROBLEMS?

If diabetes isn't treated, it can lead to a number of different health problems. High glucose levels can damage blood vessels, nerves and organs. Even a mildly raised glucose level that doesn't cause any symptoms can have damaging effects in the long term. Diabetes increases your risk of:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Nerve damage
- Diabetic retinopathy - damage to your eyes and potential sight loss
- Kidney disease
- Foot ulcers – potentially leading to amputation
- Sexual dysfunction

Everyone with diabetes should be invited to have their eyes screened once a year. This can be accessed through your GP.

If you have diabetes, it is important that you learn how to manage the condition. Short courses – such as the DESMOND programme for people with type 2 diabetes – can help. If you have diabetes and you haven't yet attended an education programme, talk to your GP or diabetes care team, as they can refer you to a local one.

USEFUL CONTACTS

DIABETES UK

Central Office: 020 7424 1000

Careline: 0345 123 2399

9am – 7pm Monday – Friday

info@diabetes.org.uk

www.diabetes.org.uk

DIABETES UK BARNET VOLUNTARY GROUP

Local support for people living with diabetes, their families and carers

Telephone: 020 8205 0668

Email: secretary@diabetes-barnet.org.uk

Website: barnet.diabetesukgroup.org

TRAINING RESEARCH & EDUCATION FOR NURSES IN DIABETES

Specialist organisation including a number of publications

Telephone: 020 7627 1510

Email: trend@sbcommunicationsgroup.com

Website: www.trend-uk.org

JEWISH CARE DIRECT

To find the right Jewish Care service for you, listen and support you, provide information about social care and other organisations who can help if Jewish Care can't.

Telephone: 020 8922 2222

Email: helpline@jcare.org

Website: www.jewishcare.org

NHS CHOICES

Website: www.nhs.uk

Please contact 020 8922 2450 if you require this information in larger print or an alternative format.