

# World Diabetes Day



The prevalence of diabetes has almost doubled over the last 40 to 50 years, owing to increased numbers of people with obesity and sedentary lifestyles. Diabetes is a silent disease that is often diagnosed when the individual has started developing complications. Despite its prevalence, not a lot of people know the critical information about this condition or how to prevent it.

World Diabetes Day is commemorated each year on the anniversary of the birth of the person who invented insulin – Sir Frederick Banting. On this day, we spread the message that there should be greater awareness, better care and access to preventative care for all.

## What do I need to know?

Approximately one in every 10 adults worldwide has diabetes, and half of them are undiagnosed. Diabetes is a chronic metabolic illness that is characterised by elevated glucose levels in the blood due to an inability of the body to break down glucose or use it.

**Type 1 diabetes** is usually genetic and diagnosed early in life. The average age of diagnosis ranges from 5 years old to 20 years. This type of diabetes is marked by the body's inability to produce enough insulin, a critical hormone needed to break down glucose and convert it to energy. It is often referred to as 'juvenile diabetes' and is managed through insulin injections.

**Type 2 diabetes** is more common (approximately 90% of all diabetics) and is usually diagnosed in adulthood. A sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy habits have been identified as the greatest causes of this form of diabetes. The body produces insulin, however, the end organs and tissues that need the broken-down glucose are no longer sensitive to it, leading to higher levels of glucose in the bloodstream. It often goes undiagnosed for years due to symptoms developing slowly over time. This is the reason for increased complications. This form of diabetes is often referred to as 'non-insulin dependent' diabetes.



## What to look out for and the three 'polys' of diabetes:

- often very thirsty (polydipsia)
- waking up at night often to pee (polyuria)
- often really hungry (polyphagia)
- losing weight without trying



Diabetes is easily diagnosed with a finger prick and testing the drop of blood for high glucose levels. If you make your annual health checks a habit, you stand a greater chance of identifying diabetes early, before complications develop.

## Why is this important?

Diabetes is a major cause of blindness, kidney failure, heart attacks and stroke, and lower limb amputations. This is the case despite diabetes being a preventable and manageable condition. High levels of glucose in the blood over a prolonged period of time leads to damaged nerves and blood vessels. High glucose levels often target blood vessels and nerves that go to the feet, eyes and kidneys, causing numbness and loss of feeling in the feet, blindness as well as kidney failure. Many other organs are affected, however, the above are the most common.

Follow a healthy diet



Maintain a healthy body weight



Go for your annual health checks



Exercise regularly

Avoid smoking

## What do I need to do to prevent diabetes?

## What if I am already a diagnosed diabetic?

Comply with your treatment



Your annual check-up must include a heart exam, foot exam, eye exam and kidney function tests



Exercise, eat healthy foods and manage your weight

Critical management of other chronic conditions such as hypertension and high cholesterol

[www.idf.org](http://www.idf.org) | [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)



[alexforbes.com](http://alexforbes.com)

**alexforbes**

insight • advice • impact