Diabetes

Diabetes is a serious, and incurable disease, that is on the increase in our society. Some believe that it is becoming an epidemic due to the fact that we eat very badly (over eat & under eat), smoke too much, suffer from too much stress and don’t exercise enough.

Diabetes is the 4th main cause of death (of diseases and accidents combined)

it pre-disposes heart attack & stroke

it is the leading cause of blindness

it is the most common cause of amputation, when a lower limb has to be cut off due to an infection (gangrene).

The good news is that medical scientists have shown that the worst side effects of diabetes can be prevented, and that the disease can be reversed significantly by modest changes to our diets, and by making a habit of regular exercise. Most diabetes sufferers can live for many healthy years with their disease provided they take good care of themselves. However, once you develop diabetes, it is with you for the rest of your life. Would it not be better to avoid it?

# Understanding diabetes

***What is diabetes?***

What happens in the body to make someone a diabetic?

When the food we eat is digested, the carbohydrates (found in bread, mealie meal, rice, samp, sugar, fruit, vegetables, sweets, chips, drinks – alcohol, sweetened cold drinks and sugared hot drinks) are broken down into its simplest form, called glucose.

The body needs glucose for energy. This glucose is transferred from the intestines into the blood, and is carried to the Liver. The Liver stores the glucose and releases it slowly into the blood so that it can be used for energy for the functioning of the body throughout the day. When the glucose is released into the blood it is a signal for another small organ, the Pancreas, to release Insulin. If this doesn’t happen an abnormal build up of glucose will develop in the bloodstream and this is called diabetes.

It is a sad fact of life that there are more and more overweight adults and children walking this Earth, due only to bad eating habits and a severe lack of exercise. This therefore explains why there is such an upsurge of diabetes worldwide – millions of people have this disease, and it is on the increase.

***How do you know when you have got diabetes?***

The tell tale signs of diabetes are the following, even though the person might be eating well:

* an unquenchable thirst (continuously thirsty),
* a sudden loss of weight,
* passing an abnormal amount of urine,
* a feeling of extreme tiredness all the time, shortness of breath
* confusion, irritability, double vision, sweating, abnormal hunger, pains in the legs and feet, infections that heal very slowly, or wont heal at all.

***Dangers of diabetes***

* Diabetes damages the small blood vessels throughout the body – especially those of the heart, the eyes, the kidneys and the nerves.
* Many Diabetics become blind.
* Many suffer from kidney diseases and eventually kidney failure.
* The risk of a heart attack or stroke becomes a reality.
* The nerve endings are damaged, which has an affect on the whole body.
* Diabetes greatly increases the chance of high cholesterol, high blood pressure (HBP) and heart problems.
* Constipation is common (but can be controlled with the correct diet).
* Uncontrolled Diabetics can collapse into unconsciousness, and if not given immediate assistance, can die.
* The amputation of lower limbs is very common in uncontrolled diabetics – care of feet and lower legs are vitally important.
* Diabetics suffer from depression – it is NOT nice having diabetes.

# How can we assist diabetics to live a healthier life?

***Eating the correct diet is vitally important in controlling diabetes***

* Diabetics should eat 5 small meals per day to keep their sugar levels constant.
* Diabetics should eat as little fat as possible. Cut excess fat off meat, avoid lots of fatty fried foods, biscuits, cakes, chips and fast foods.
* Diabetics should eat a diet high in vegetables – fresh or cooked, and preferably vegetables that have been grown organically.
* Diabetics should have a moderate protein intake. (Meat & chicken.)
* Foods that normalise blood sugar and that should be eaten regularly are dairy products, (low fat milk, yoghurt, maas, and cheese) fish, garlic, egg yolk, soya beans, cabbage, celery, onions and berries of all kinds – if unavailable, drink mixed berry juice.
* Diabetics, who are well controlled, can eat very small amounts of sugar and fruit occasionally, but then they need to monitor their sugar levels carefully.
* Diabetics should try to eat natural, unprocessed foods, with high fibre content – vegetables with the skins on, whole grain flour, whole grain mealie meal.
* Diabetics should eat much smaller amounts of mealie pap, samp, bread (white or brown), rice & potatoes as these break down after digestion into high glucose (blood sugar) in the blood.
* Drink natural fruit juices – diluted by half with water.
* Drink 6-8 glasses water daily.
* Cut down on salt – don’t cook with salt, and sprinkle very little on the food – taste first, before sprinkling. Learn to use herbs to flavour the food.
* Avoid MSG – spicy mixtures, sauces, and pre-cooked foods generally contain MSG. Learn to read the labels of the foods you buy. MSG aggravates diabetes.
* Avoid using artificial sweeteners. They aggravate the body and are detrimental to good health – being an unnecessary chemical that the body has to deal with. This means NO “sugar free” or “diet” drinks, and NO “sugar free” sweets.

***Exercise is essential***

Build up muscular strength – do a minimum of 1 hour of exercise daily - physical work, gardening, brisk walking, gym, any sport, swimming, all improve the body’s ability to use the glucose in the blood stream and improves the ability of insulin to do its job better. This improves the quality of health and the mental attitude of a diabetic.

Exercise definitely prolongs the lifespan of a diabetic.

***Strengthen the skin of feet and legs***

Any injury of toes & feet is to be taken very seriously, as it is very difficult to heal the feet of a Diabetic, and sepsis will lead to amputation. Diabetics should never walk bare foot and should always wear good shoes and closed shoes.

It has been found that rubbing the lower legs & feet with a cream or lotion containing Tea Tree oil will strengthen the skin and prevent infections from developing.

Daily care of the feet is vital, apply cream to keep the feet soft and take care not to injure the toes or toenails when trimming them.

# What should we do to avoid diabetes?

***Don’t become overweight***

You alone are responsible for the size of your body and your health. Overeating is a bad habit with far reaching complications for your health. If you notice that you have gained even as little as 10-15 kg., make every effort to lose that weight with the correct diet. The more weight you gain, the harder it is to lose. It is NOT a status symbol to be overweight – it is as good as arranging your own death sentence.

***If you are already overweight – REDUCE weight***

The fatter your body, the more resistant it becomes to insulin, and diabetes can develop. To reduce weight properly, it is very important to get advice from a dietician or nutritionist, so that you follow a lifestyle diet plan to reduce weight and to keep that weight off. Do not follow crash diets, or your own uninformed idea of what a diet is, or starve yourself, or use commercially advertised diet aids. All these are ineffective, and you will gain more weight in the long run.

***Learn all you can about eating properly***

* Educate yourself about what food is good for your health.
* Eat high fibre foods - whole grains of all kinds; eat more dried bean dishes, at least 5 portions of fresh fruit & vegetables daily; buy the best food you can afford.
* Reduce refined sugars (white sugar), refined fats (margarine), and eat smaller amounts of protein (meat, fish, chicken, eggs, or cheese).
* White bread, super white mealie meal, snack foods, fast foods, highly spiced foods, chips, biscuits, cakes, sweets, convenience meals, are all highly processed foods. These foods often contain excessive hidden fats. These foods are also expensive.
* Eat 3-5 small meals daily – not just one large meal at night – the lack of food for the whole day, and then the sudden arrival of a lot of food at night plays havoc with blood sugar levels.