

Diabetes: Defusing a Potential Timebomb

Diabetes is a potential timebomb in the UK. There are 1.5 million people with the condition, which accounts for one tenth of NHS spending (£4.9 billion). Diabetes UK estimates there are another "missing million" undiagnosed people.

Early diagnosis is vital, as diabetes can lead to life-threatening and devastating complications such as kidney failure, heart disease and blindness if untreated.

Despite the large number of people with diabetes already identified, there still appears to be a lack of awareness of diabetes, with 75 per cent of high-risk individuals unaware they are in danger of developing the condition. A report by the Audit Commission in April revealed that half of all people with diabetes are diagnosed only when they have already suffered complications. This seemingly late diagnosis is both detrimental to the health of the patient and a significant cost burden to the Nation's health services. The T2ARDIS (Type 2 Diabetes: Accounting for a Major Resource Demand in Society) study estimates the NHS spends four times as much on the treatment of people with diabetes who have suffered complications than those who have avoided them.

Diabetes, What is it?

Diabetes mellitus is a condition in which the body loses its ability to process sugar. It can affect anyone at any age and arises when a gland in the body, called the pancreas, is unable to produce any or sufficient amounts of the hormone INSULIN.

There are 2 types of diabetes

1. Type 1: This is where the pancreas stops producing insulin altogether. Usually occurs in childhood up to the age of 35 years.
2. Type 2: This is where the pancreas is still making insulin but not enough for the body's requirements. Usually occurs later in life and is more likely to occur in people who are overweight.

Diabetes, The warning signs

Symptoms of diabetes include:

- Increased thirst
- Excessive urination
- Tiredness and lethargy
- Reduced resistance to infection
- Blurred vision
- Weight loss

Diabetes, What is the treatment?

Treatment depends on the type of diabetes and ranges from improving diet and exercise to tablets and insulin injections.

Diabetes can be managed by controlling and monitoring blood glucose levels, that is the amount of sugar in the blood.

People with diabetes have an increased risk of developing heart disease, kidney problems, eye problems and circulation problems. However, the good news is that recent clinical trials - UKPDS and DCCT - show that by keeping blood sugar levels as near to normal as possible greatly reduces these risks.

Regularly measuring and recording blood glucose levels reviews blood sugar control and aids with the most appropriate changes to treatment. This will help to ensure the avoidance of long-term

complications.

For further information on diabetes please contact:

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