Type 2 Diabetes

What is type 2 diabetes?
When someone has diabetes, the body is unable to maintain normal levels of glucose in the blood. Glucose is an important source of energy for the body and comes from carbohydrate foods we eat, including bread, pasta, rice, cereals, fruits, potatoes, milk and yoghurt. The body breaks carbohydrates down to glucose which then enters the blood stream. For glucose to enter the cells and be used for energy, a hormone called insulin must be available.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas cannot make enough insulin or when the insulin that is made doesn’t work properly, which causes blood glucose levels to rise. Fortunately, by managing your diabetes well, you can reduce the risk of developing other health complications.

Who is at risk of type 2 diabetes?
Type 2 is the most common form of diabetes and accounts for 85–90% of all cases of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in adults, but younger people and even children are now developing diabetes.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include:
» having a family history of diabetes
» being overweight or obese
» having an inactive lifestyle
» having an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
» being from a certain cultural background, including Melanesian, Polynesian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern or Indian
» women who have had gestational diabetes
» women who have had polycystic ovarian syndrome.

If you think that you or someone in your family is at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, visit the Diabetes Australia website at diabetesaustralia.com.au for more information.

Can type 2 diabetes be prevented or cured?
People who are at risk of type 2 diabetes can delay and in some cases even prevent getting type 2 diabetes by following a healthy lifestyle. This includes regular exercise, making healthy food choices and maintaining a healthy body weight.

There is no cure for type 2 diabetes. However a great deal of research is being done to find a cure.

What are the symptoms of type 2 diabetes?
Symptoms of type 2 diabetes can be serious because they may show that you have developed a diabetes-related health complication that needs treatment. Sometimes the symptoms of type 2 diabetes can go unnoticed, and some people do not get any symptoms at all.

For more information about the symptoms of type 2 diabetes, visit the NDSS website ndss.com.au
How should I manage type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes can often be managed with healthy eating and regular physical activity in the beginning. However, as time goes by, most people need tablets and many will also need insulin or another type of injected medicine to help keep the blood glucose levels within the target range recommended by their doctor or diabetes specialist.

Diabetes can make you feel unwell if your blood glucose levels are too high (hyperglycaemia) or too low (hypoglycaemia). Managing your blood glucose levels can help you manage your diabetes and reduce the risk of long term complications from diabetes, such as eye, kidney or nerve damage.

There are many steps for looking after yourself and leading a healthy and active life.

Some tips for managing your diabetes include:

» Keep your blood glucose levels within the target range recommended by your doctor or diabetes specialist.

» If your doctor has recommended diabetes medication for you, take the correct dose at the times agreed with your doctor.

» Follow a healthy eating plan – a dietitian will be able to help you with this.

» Be active as much as possible. If you have not been active for some time and plan to do more exercise, you should first talk to your doctor. Your doctor will check to see if it is safe for you to begin exercising and will help you with your exercise plan.

» Aim for a healthy weight. Research shows that being overweight makes it harder to control blood glucose levels and increases the risk of heart disease.

» Have regular check-ups with your doctor, including checking your eyes and feet, as well as your blood pressure and cholesterol.

» Keep a positive attitude and always ask for help from your diabetes healthcare team whenever you need it.

Visit the NDSS website ndss.com.au for information on blood glucose monitoring, healthy eating, and managing your diabetes. Call the NDSS on 1300 136 588 to find out about diabetes education programs that are available in your area.

Who can help me?

Diabetes is best managed with the support of a diabetes care team, which includes your family and friends, and also diabetes or medical specialists such as:

» your regular doctor

» a credentialled diabetes educator

» an accredited practising dietitian

» a registered podiatrist

» an accredited exercise physiologist

» a counsellor.

Your doctor may be able to refer you or provide advice about who should be in your diabetes team. Your diabetes team may change as your needs change, but they will help you to learn about diabetes, and provide support and guidance so you can confidently make decisions about managing your diabetes.

The NDSS can provide you with support to help you manage your diabetes. Speak to your doctor about registering you with the NDSS or call the NDSS on 1300 136 588.

Do I have to eat special foods?

You do not need to buy expensive foods or prepare special meals if you have diabetes. However it is important to eat healthy foods to help manage your blood glucose levels. Make sure you have regular meals and never skip a meal, and choose a variety of foods from each of these groups:

» a small amount of fish, skinless chicken, lean meat or egg, or if you are a vegetarian, soy, legumes or nuts

» lots of salads and non-starchy vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, tomato, asparagus and carrots

» a small amount of wholegrain bread and cereals, starch vegetables (e.g. corn, pumpkin or potato), pasta, rice (e.g. basmati), beans and lentils, fruit or low fat milk and yoghurt.

Speak to a dietitian or visit the NDSS website ndss.com.au to find out more about how to make healthy food choices.

Do I need to cut out sugar?

A small amount of sugar is okay but you should avoid sweet drinks, sugary foods and lollies. The exact amount of sugar you can have will vary from person to person so it is best to speak to a dietitian. There are also alternative sweeteners that can be used as a substitute for sugar. For more information visit the NDSS website ndss.com.au
Are there other foods I should avoid?

Too much salt can increase your blood pressure, which can increase the long term damage from diabetes. Avoid adding extra salt when cooking and limit the amount of processed foods you eat, such as tinned food, fast foods or processed meats like sausages, ham and bacon.

You should also limit foods which are high in fat because they will make you gain weight and can increase your cholesterol and the risk of heart disease. High fat foods that you should avoid include the fat on meat, skin on chicken, butter, cheese, cream, copha, coconut milk, fast food or fried take-away foods, pies, pasties, sausage rolls, and processed meats such as sausages, ham and bacon.

Can I still drink alcohol?

Alcohol can increase your weight and blood pressure and increase the risk of hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose). If you drink alcohol, choose light beer, wine or diet mixers, drink plenty of water, don’t drink on an empty stomach, and don’t have more than two standard drinks per day. If you need more information, talk to your doctor.

What about smoking?

Smoking affects your health badly. Over time, smoking can damage blood vessels and may cause them to block up and can increase your risk of cardiovascular disease (including heart attack and stroke). If you would like help to stop smoking contact Quitline on 13 78 48.

Why should I exercise?

Regular exercise can improve muscle and heart function, and reduce tension and stress. Exercise and healthy eating can help to lower blood fats and blood pressure and reduce the risk of diabetes complications. If you haven’t exercised for a long time but plan to do more exercise, you should first talk to your doctor. Your doctor will check to see if it is safe for you to begin exercising and will help you with your exercise plan.

You should aim for **30 minutes of exercise on most, preferably all, days of the week**. The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults are available from [health.gov.au](http://health.gov.au).

Will other medications affect my diabetes?

Some medications may affect your diabetes or have side effects, so always take a list of all your medications to each appointment with your doctor, including any that you bought over the counter or any complementary (herbal) medications.
Will diabetes affect my driver’s licence?

There are rules in each state and territory about which health conditions must be reported, so you should contact your local driver licensing authority to check the requirements in your state or territory.

In March 2012 medical standards were introduced for drivers of both private and commercial vehicles. These standards help doctors to decide whether a person should be able to drive. These standards are in the Austroads ‘Assessing Fitness to Drive’ document and are available from austroads.com.au. Talk to your doctor about how these medical standards may affect you.

If you treat your diabetes with insulin or other glucose-lowering medication, you are at risk of hypoglycaemia or a hypo (low blood glucose). Be prepared for a hypo by:

- testing your blood glucose before driving and make sure it is above 5mmol/L
- carrying a diabetes ID in your car
- always carrying a fast acting carbohydrate food or sugary drink in your car
- do not drive for more than 2 hours without having a snack
- do not delay or miss a main meal.

For more information on diabetes and driving, visit ndss.com.au

Do I tell my insurer?

If you have life, personal or accident insurance, you need to tell your insurer that you have diabetes. If you have any problems and wish to discuss them with an independent person, you can call the insurance ombudsman on 1300 780 808.

Do I tell my employer?

Generally, you are only required to tell your employer that you have diabetes if it would impact on your ability to perform your job, for example if you operate heavy machinery or drive public transport. However it is helpful to tell your employer, and even your colleagues, about your diabetes in case of an emergency. You should also talk to your employer about needing regular meal breaks, taking medication or testing blood glucose levels during work.

Where can I get more information?

Whether you have just been diagnosed or had diabetes for some time, it is important that you get the right support for managing your diabetes.

The National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) provides education and support to help you manage your diabetes, and registration is free. The NDSS is an initiative of the Australian Government administered by Diabetes Australia.

The NDSS provides local education programs and support groups, diabetes-related products at subsidised prices, a diabetes helpline and fact sheets, and access to health professional advice and translation services.