

Hawkes Bay Today Vital Signs Column, October 2011.

Are You at Risk of Type 2 Diabetes?

- Are you of European descent and over 40 years?
- Are you Maori / Pacific / Asian descent and over 30 years?
- Is there Diabetes in your family?
- Are you overweight?
- Have you given birth to a large baby (9lbs/4kg or over)?
- Have you had high blood glucose levels in pregnancy?
- Have you got high blood pressure?
- Have you got high cholesterol levels?

Type 2 diabetes is by far the most common form of diabetes. In New Zealand about 270,000 people have Type 2 diabetes and about one third of cases of Type 2 diabetes are undiagnosed. The numbers of people developing Type 2 diabetes is rapidly increasing. In some groups of people up to 12% of them will have Type 2 diabetes once they are aged over 40 years. Our lifestyles have a great deal to do with it, particularly our eating habits and sedentary lifestyles. The symptoms of diabetes are not always obvious. Let's investigate how we can reduce our risk . . .

What is Diabetes?

Our bodies need glucose for energy. An organ called the pancreas produces the hormone insulin which acts like a metabolic traffic cop, allowing glucose into cells where it's burnt as energy. Too much food means a traffic jam of glucose in the blood, and combined with insufficient exercise, the effect of insulin is overpowered. Instead of being a vital food source glucose becomes a threat. Persistent high glucose damages the walls of blood vessels and increases the risk of blood clots, leading to an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, kidney disease and blindness.

What the symptoms of Type 2 Diabetes?

Diabetes can exist for many years without you realizing it. Not everyone has symptoms including:

- Feeling tired and lacking energy
- Feeling thirsty
- Going to the toilet often
- Getting infections frequently
- Getting infections which are hard to heal
- Poor eyesight or blurred vision
- Often feeling hungry

If you have any of the above symptoms, discuss these with your doctor. The symptoms get better when your blood glucose is better controlled.

What is my risk?

If you answered yes to any two questions above, you may be at risk. Your doctor or I can assess your risk by measuring your blood pressure, BMI, waist size and blood glucose level in store to see if you need further investigation. There is no charge or appointment needed for this service from Ahuriri Pharmacy, so why not take advantage of it this month?

What can I do to prevent Diabetes?

Australian Doctor John D'Arcy states that if you can reduce your weight 7% and exercise for more than 21 minutes a day, you may reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 58%. Exercise can make your insulin work better and lower blood glucose levels, cholesterol and blood pressure. Here are some great tips to get active:

- Put your shoes, socks, shorts, shirt and sunscreen at the end of the bed.
- Find a friend to walk with you
- Motivate your activity plan with a pedometer. To lose a few kilos, slowly work up to 15,000 steps a day.
- Once you've got into the daily walk habit, start interval training. Use a familiar tree or hill as a starting line, and then increase your pace for a minute or two before dropping back to your usual speed. Increase the interval time every other day so you're adding speed-up sections to your walk.

It is ideal to follow a low Glycaemic Index (GI) diet, that is foods that are digested slowly, keep you feeling fuller for longer and keep your blood glucose levels even. Foods include brown rice, buckwheat, whole grain bread, lentils, broccoli, oats and peanuts. Avoid processed food as much as possible, rather eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Chromium may be useful to help regulate blood sugar levels and support pancreatic function. If you need to reduce the fat in your diet, it may be easier than you think. See <http://www.sweettalkdiabetes.com.au/home/featured-item-2> for 100 ways to cut 100+ calories a day, to aim to lose 2kg of fat a month.

World Diabetes Day, Monday 14th November, aims to increase an awareness of the effects of diabetes and its complications. The scary thing with Diabetes is that it is increasing in epidemic proportions and even affecting our children as young as 10 years old. We can all look at our diets and see if we can reduce the amounts of refined foods we eat (see www.ahuriripharmacy.co.nz for some great recipes) and find a few minutes to do some activity. Take the time out with the family to enjoy the Hawke's Bay scenery, get some fresh air and improve our health. If you fall into the "at risk" category, come and speak to Peter at the pharmacy.