

Stepping in the right direction for diabetes

Self Care health facts column

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Exercise is pretty much always a good strategy for keeping healthy, so it's really quite appropriate that as part of the promotion of World Diabetes Day on 14 November, we've been encouraged to step out and get walking; and to count those steps right up until the Diabetes World Congress in Melbourne in December. Already more than 370 million steps have been recorded on the website of the International Diabetes Federation - host of the Melbourne Congress.

Diabetes is probably one of the first medical conditions clearly described. Egyptian and Indian physicians as far back as 1500 BC documented the sweetness and increased volume of urine associated with the disease. The name *Diabetes mellitus* (meaning from honey) was coined in the 1700s and it's not surprising that the condition became commonly known as "sugar diabetes".

Now in the 21st century, diabetes is fast reaching epidemic proportions. New data show that a staggering 360 million people worldwide are living with diabetes. In Australia, studies show that nearly one in four Australian adults either has diabetes or what is known as pre diabetes; that is impaired glucose metabolism which is associated with a substantial risk of diabetes and heart disease if left untreated.

Diabetes is a condition where the body can't use glucose properly – usually because of a lack of insulin or so-called insulin resistance when the body fails to respond to its own insulin. Glucose is a particular type of sugar – it's essential for normal healthy body function; and insulin is the chemical messenger or hormone that controls the uptake of glucose by muscles, liver and fat tissues.

There's no doubt excess consumption of sugar is an unhealthy habit; but concentrating on sugar alone could be counterproductive according to nutritionist Associate Professor Timothy Gill from the University of Sydney. Sugar added to processed foods, rather than natural sugars found in milk, fruit and grains, is more problematic, he said.

The Australian Diabetes Council (ADC) agrees that it is important to take a balanced view with regard to nutrition; drawing on a range of foods rather than focusing on single nutrients as "good" or "bad". Whilst no single nutrient is responsible for weight gain or loss, total kilojoule (or calorie) intake from all food certainly is.

Weight management is an essential part of diabetes management. And put simply, the cause of being overweight or obese is too much energy in, and too little energy out. That is too much food, too little exercise. We all need to take a few more steps each day.

If you're already exercised out, there's another way you can raise awareness of diabetes in your community or workplace. It's by being part of "Blue Fridays". It's simple to participate by wearing



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something blue on Fridays throughout November. It might be just a blue shirt or blue jeans, but you could let your hair down and put a blue rinse through it; or maybe wear a blue wig! Also, you might have noticed many iconic buildings have gone blue for diabetes. In fact 250 buildings around the world including the Empire State Building in New York, the Acropolis in Athens and the Sydney Opera House will be, or have been, lit blue. Why all this blue? Well, a blue circle is the international symbol for diabetes.

Whether you have diabetes or just want to know what steps to take to help avoid becoming a statistic in the epidemic, you'll get great information from the ADC website www.australiandiabetescouncil.com. And you can also get more advice on diabetes, healthy weight maintenance and easy to manage exercises from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society's health information. For the nearest location phone 1300 369 772 or log on to the Society's website at www.psa.org.au and click on "Self Care" and then "Find a Self Care Pharmacy".