

# Diabetes - are you at risk

## Health Column

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Approximately 3.2 million Australians have diabetes or pre-diabetes while worldwide 366 million people are affected. National Diabetes Week runs from July 12 to 18 and everyone is encouraged to have checks and learn more about this disease.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that occurs when there is too much glucose in the blood. This happens if the body is not producing insulin or not using insulin properly. Insulin is required to enable glucose to enter the body's cells and be converted to energy.

Glucose is a particular type of sugar – it is needed to provide energy for the body. Insulin is the hormone or chemical messenger that controls how the muscles, liver and fat tissues use glucose.

There are a number of different types of diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is a condition in which the pancreas does not produce insulin. This type represents 10–15% of all cases of diabetes and is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases in developed nations. Type 1 diabetes is not caused by lifestyle factors, yet its incidence is increasing at a rate of about 3% a year.

Most people with diabetes, around 85%, have type 2 diabetes. They still produce insulin but it does not work as well. It usually affects mature adults, but younger people, even children, are now getting type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is more common in people who have low levels of physical activity or are overweight or obese, but it also occurs in people who have a family history of it.

Less well known is gestational diabetes – a form of diabetes that occurs in pregnancy and mostly disappears after the birth. This type may be caused by the woman's body not being able to make enough insulin or not being able to use it correctly during pregnancy. It is usually found by having a blood test between 24 and 28 weeks of pregnancy.

Pre-diabetes is a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not yet high enough for a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes. Left untreated it may develop into type 2 diabetes within 5 to 10 years.



A balanced diet and regular physical activity are key elements of preventing and managing diabetes. Being overweight or obese increases the chance of getting diabetes. While the underlying causes of obesity are complex, the resulting problems are well known; type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular (heart and blood vessel) disease, osteoarthritis and sleep apnoea are some of these problems.

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'. No single food is responsible for weight gain or loss, but our total kilojoule (or calorie) intake from all food is what can cause problems.

During National Diabetes Week visit your local pharmacy to learn more about diabetes and how it can be managed. If you have any of the risk factors for diabetes such as excess weight or smoking, now is the perfect time to ask your pharmacist about lifestyle changes.

Pharmacies can offer a range of resources and support for diabetes including:

- diabetes screening tests with referrals to your doctor
- diabetes management services including monitoring of blood glucose levels, weight and diabetes medicines
- advice on diabetes medicines
- review of diabetes medicines
- weight management services
- blood glucose monitoring devices
- supply of blood glucose test strips as part of the National Diabetes Services Scheme
- quit smoking products and services
- health information including Self Care Fact Cards.

You can get more advice on diabetes from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's (PSA) Self Care health information. Self Care Fact Cards include *Blood Glucose Monitoring, Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes* plus *Weight and Health*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.