

The ages and stages of diabetes

Worldwide, the number of adults with diabetes has more than doubled over the past 30 years. According to a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in conjunction with the World Health Organisation, almost 350 million people now have the fastest-growing chronic health condition. These are sobering statistics at the time of Diabetes Awareness Week (14 - 20 July).

Australia is not immune to this epidemic. More than 1 million Australians have been diagnosed as having diabetes; and it's estimated that at least another 2 million people over the age of 25 have what is known as impaired glucose tolerance or "pre-diabetes"- putting them at greatly increased risk of diabetes itself.

Diabetes Awareness Week is a time when we're encouraged to become more aware of, not only the extent of the disease and its complications, but also the now very effective management and prevention strategies.

This year the occasion also marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Australian Diabetes Council (the ADC – originally known as Diabetes Australia NSW) and the publication of the book *Ages and Stages with Diabetes*. The ADC is the biggest not-for-profit member-based health organisation in Australia; and has one of the largest diabetes memberships in the world.

As Australian Diabetes Council CEO, Nicola Stokes, states, "Diabetes is a condition that can affect any one at any age or any stage in their lives – whether you've just started school, accepted a new job, planning to travel overseas, just about to start a family or planning retirement – and it can affect what and when you eat and even how you sleep."

The ADC book contains a wealth of tips and information for everyone with diabetes (as well as their family and friends) with topics such as helping your children with diabetes enjoy a school camp, learning to drive and getting a licence, alcohol and diabetes, pre-planning a pregnancy with diabetes, travelling with diabetes, sick day management and of course controlling those blood glucose levels at every age and every stage of life.

Uncontrolled diabetes poses a serious risk to our health. Complications can include blindness, kidney failure and increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Diabetes, commonly called sugar diabetes, is the name given to the condition where our body is unable to use glucose properly – and glucose is our major energy source; the fuel which keeps our body functioning effectively.

There are two major forms of diabetes – type 1 and type 2.

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in childhood or young adulthood – possibly because the body's immune system runs a bit wild and attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas gland. As the body stops making insulin, people with this form of diabetes need daily doses of insulin - by injection or by one of the new insulin pumps.

However, type 2 diabetes is the form of diabetes likely to affect most Australians (in type 2, insulin is produced, but we just can't use it effectively). Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in older adults, but increasingly the condition is affecting younger people. Family history is one reason. But our parents are not totally to blame. Lifestyle issues are also highly significant. Type 2 diabetes can often be managed by attention to diet and exercise.

You can check your own risk of becoming a diabetes statistic, and learn about the ages and stages with diabetes, via the Australian Diabetes Council website: www.australiandiabetescouncil.com. You can also get more information about diabetes from one of the 1,500 pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information. Phone 1300 369 772 for the nearest location or go to the Pharmaceutical Society's website at www.psa.org.au and click on "Self Care" then "Find a Self Care Pharmacy".