

<http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare>

Sugar!

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, and published just last month in the *Lancet* medical journal, almost 350 million people now have the fastest-growing chronic health condition. Sobering statistics at the time of Diabetes Awareness Week (10-16 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"- making them at greatly increased risk of diabetes itself.

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. Because the body stops making insulin, people with this form of diabetes need daily doses of insulin.

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 – it used to be called maturity onset diabetes – but increasingly the condition is affecting younger people. Family history is one reason.

Of course our parents are not totally to blame. Family history is just one risk factor. Lifestyle issues are also highly significant. Overweight and obese adults are two to four times more likely to suffer from diabetes.

We now know that high blood pressure is another major risk factor for diabetes; a factor which is apparently not widely understood. According to Dr Neville Howard, from the Australian Diabetes Council, "there is a staggering lack of awareness about the link between high blood pressure and developing diabetes and its serious complications".

There is no "ideal" blood pressure – it will vary from person to person; but as a guide the target blood pressure is less than or equal to 130/80.

Lifestyle changes are also the key to reducing the risks of and treating high blood pressure, said Dr Howard. This should involve healthy eating, regular exercise, drinking lots of water, reduced salt intake, alcohol in moderation (no more than two standard drinks per day) and no smoking.

Majid Ezzati, chair of global environmental health at Imperial College London and one of the authors of the *Lancet* study, said that "diabetes may well become the defining issue of global health for the next decade". He went on to say that much of the increase is due to ageing populations, but part of it has been fuelled by rising obesity rates.

So, most of us will need to lose some weight and distance around our waist line. The aim should be a waist circumference of less than 80cm for women and 94cm for men.

And every time we visit the doctor we should get our blood pressure checked. If we seem otherwise healthy, we should make sure we have at least a yearly check up, especially if we're over 40.

You can get more information about diabetes from the Diabetes Australia website or pick up a Fact Card 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 Pharmacy Finder".