



# **NHG World Diabetes Day 2023**

## **FAQs**

## Endocrinology

### **Why do we need to have good control of diabetes?**

It is important to control diabetes to prevent or delay complications. These include heart disease, stroke, lower limb amputation, loss of vision, and kidney disease. It will also help to reduce the risk of being hospitalised for a diabetes-related emergency.

### **We often hear about HbA1c levels, what is the HbA1c target that we need to aim for?**

In general, the target is a HbA1c of less than 7%. The aim is to achieve a blood glucose level that is close to normal, while keeping the risk of hypoglycaemia to a minimum. The target HbA1c may change over time depending on the individual's age and health condition. A lower or higher HbA1c may be more appropriate to balance the risk and benefits of diabetes treatment. Do discuss your HbA1c target with your healthcare team.

### **During routine medical check-ups, my doctor also advised me to go for eye and feet screening even when I feel well. Is it necessary to go for them?**

Diabetes can affect the eyes and lead to eventual loss of vision. There may not be any symptoms in the early stages, but the changes can be detected by screening. Diabetes also affects the feet by reducing blood supply and sensation, hence leaving a patient vulnerable to injury, subsequent infection and hence amputation. These complications usually take time to progress and may not be noticed early on. It is important to pick up minor abnormalities early so that interventions can be made to retard the progression of disease.

### **If I have diabetes, how do I prevent my family members from getting diabetes?**

Genes do play an important role in the development of diabetes. However, paying attention to modifiable risk factors such as diet, physical activity, smoking and weight can help to reduce the risk of developing diabetes. For example, family members often have similar eating and exercise habits; children learn lifestyle habits from parents which then continue into adulthood. By encouraging healthy food choices, regular exercise, maintaining ideal body weight and smoking cessation, we can delay and even prevent diabetes.

### **Why do some patients develop post operative post complications like poor wound healing?**

Diabetes affects wound healing in many ways. For example, in poorly controlled diabetes, high sugar load in the blood may increase the risk of bacteria growth and infection. Secondly, prolonged exposure to high blood glucose can contribute to blood vessel narrowing, which reduces blood flow needed for wound healing.

## Nutrition and Dietetics

### **Are there any diet or food that you would recommend for patients with diabetes?**

There is no special diet for diabetes. Eating a balanced, healthy diet can help optimize blood sugar control in diabetes. You can follow the 'My Healthy Plate' rule: a quarter for grains, a quarter for lean protein, and half for vegetables. Choose whole grains as your main source of carbohydrates and be mindful of portion sizes. All these factors work together to optimize your blood sugar levels.

### **What is glycaemic index (GI)?**

The glycaemic index (GI) measures how quickly a food raises blood sugar levels. Foods with a high GI are rapidly digested and cause a quick rise in blood sugar, while low GI foods lead to a slower rise.

### **How do we reduce the glycaemic index of food?**

Low GI foods include basmati rice, multigrain bread, rolled oats, low-fat milk, and beans. However, remember that portion control is essential, and not all low GI foods are healthy.

The GI of a food can be influenced by factors like cooking methods and food combinations. For instance, pairing a high GI food like porridge with protein and fibre-rich foods like vegetables can lower the overall GI of your meal.

### **Are fruits then bad for diabetes?**

No, although fruits contain natural sugars that can affect blood sugar levels, they also provide essential vitamins, minerals, and fibre. People with diabetes do not need to avoid fresh fruits or certain sweet-tasting fruits; portion size is key, and the usual recommended intake is 2 servings per day.

Fruit juice is not recommended, as it is high in sugar and lacks fibre, leading to spikes in blood sugar levels.

### **How about artificial sweeteners in soda drinks?**

Artificial sweeteners can be a sugar alternative with reduced calorie content. People with diabetes can use artificial sweeteners to satisfy sweet cravings without significantly affecting blood sugar levels. However, it's still advisable to consume them in moderation. Water remains the best beverage choice.

### **What about snacks when doing leisure activities like watching TV? Are there any healthy snacks to recommend?**

If you need a snack, choose healthier options with portion control. For example: A small tub of low-fat yogurt, a slice of wholemeal bread with a thin spread of peanut butter or a slice of low-fat cheese, 1-2 cups of unsweetened/unsalted popcorn, ½ cup of steamed/boiled edamame, a fresh fruit like papaya, pineapple, or an apple with portion control or a handful of unsalted nuts.

Be mindful of mindless eating while watching television. Eat only when you are hungry and stop when you are full.

### **Some patients who are on oral medications or on insulin are also concerned regarding behaviour change. If they are on insulin or medications, does it mean that they can eat whatever they want?**

No, it's not true. Even if you are on insulin and medications, it's still important to maintain a healthy, balanced diet with appropriate portion sizes for better blood sugar control. This can help reduce the need for higher insulin and medication dosages due to suboptimal blood sugar control.

## **How would we know that we are taking just the right amount of carbohydrates while at the same time preventing ourselves from getting hungry?**

The amount of carbs an individual needs depends on factors such as age, weight, physical activity level, medications, and overall diabetes control. Regular blood sugar monitoring can give you an idea of how your food intake affects your blood sugar levels. If you often feel hungry when you reduce your carb intake, try increasing fibre in your diet, as it improves satiety and promotes better blood sugar control. Good sources of fibre include whole grains like brown rice, wholemeal bread, oats, vegetables, fruits, beans/legumes, nuts, and seeds.

Keep in mind that hunger can sometimes indicate low blood sugar levels. Check your blood sugar regularly and consult your healthcare professional if you frequently experience low blood sugar.

## **Can a person with diabetes consume sports drinks if they participate in more than 1 hour of moderate to high intensity exercise?**

While sports drinks provide electrolytes, most of them contain carbohydrates that can affect blood sugar levels. For people with diabetes engaging in moderate-high intensity exercise for more than 1-hour, additional carbohydrates may be necessary depending on their blood sugar levels.

It's also advisable to have a source of fast-acting sugar, such as a mini can of regular soft drinks or a packet of regular fruit juice, on hand due to the increased risk of hypoglycaemia during exercise.

Always monitor your blood sugar before, during, and after exercise to make necessary dietary adjustments.

If you are on insulin or medications that can cause low blood sugar, it's best to consult a dietitian for an individualized meal plan for exercise management.

## **What are the practical tips to sustain changes in diet during a busy working day?**

Some of the ways to sustain changes in diet would include:

- Set achievable goals within a reasonable timeframe.
- Make changes gradually rather than all at once to avoid frustration, which can lead to a loss of motivation.
- Start by packing your meals with simple, healthy recipes that fit your busy schedule.
- If you need snacks while working, prepare healthier options like unsalted nuts and seeds, low-fat yogurt, wholemeal bread, or wholemeal biscuits.
- Be cautious of mindless eating. Eat only when you are hungry and stop when you are full.

## Physiotherapy

### **What exercise intensity and frequency is recommended for people with diabetes so that it does not overstress the body?**

It is recommended for people with diabetes to achieve 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercises per week. These exercises can include aerobic exercises such as brisk-walking or jogging and strengthening exercises with weights.

Intensity can be determined using the rate of perceived exertion scale. It is a scale from 0-10 where 0 is no exertion at all like resting on the sofa and 10 is maximal exertion where you feel extremely breathless.

People with diabetes should aim to exercise at around the intensity of 2-3 out of 10 for moderate intensity. This should feel like brisk-walking or a jog in a park. Additionally, talk test can also be used where you should feel that you can talk but unable to sing when doing exercises.

### **What are practical ideas to sustain an exercise regime amid a busy workday?**

There are a couple ways where you can sustain an exercise regime even with a busy schedule. Firstly, you can plan your exercises to fit your schedule. Some people will find it more convenient if their exercises are split into multiple mini sessions of 10 – 15 minutes while some people may prefer to exercise daily for 30 – 45 minutes. The most important aspect is to ensure that you can exercise for a total of 150 minutes at moderate intensity in a week.

Secondly, you can use household or office items which are readily available as opposed to actual gym equipment. 1-Litre bottles of water can serve as 1kg dumbbells while a bag of rice or beans can also act as weights for you to do exercises whenever convenient.

Finally, you can also try roping in your family or friends to do those exercises with you to encourage and motivate yourself to stick to the exercise regime and make it a habit!



## Podiatry

### **What type of footwear should a patient with diabetes wear in general?**

Footwear should have cushioning and supportive features and be well fitted to your feet. You should opt for footwear with broad and deep toe box with adjustable fixations to accommodate any swelling or insoles if required.

### **Should I try a corn plaster if I have diabetes?**

It is not recommended as corn plasters contain acid which may cause chemical burns with prolonged usage. With diabetes, you may have weaker skin condition. Combined with possible impaired sensation of your feet, you may not be able to feel pain even with superficial chemical burn to your skin.

### **Would it be recommended for patients with diabetes to go for foot reflexology?**

It is not recommended especially if you have sensory neuropathy/ impaired sensation of your feet. You may not be able to feel pain if excessive amount of force is applied during the reflexology session. This may cause potential fractures of your joints and risk development of foot deformities.