

Nutrition News!

Edition 3: Diabetes and Older People

July 2011

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a complex disorder whereby insulin, secreted by the pancreas, is unable to maintain normal blood glucose (sugar) levels. This is because there is either not enough insulin and/or the insulin does not work properly. Diabetes can be managed by a combination of diet, exercise and/or medications to maintain both good nutrition and desired blood glucose levels. Diabetes is a progressive disorder so appropriate management often changes with time and is specific to the needs of each person.

The problem of complications

Managing diabetes is important to reduce the complications of poorly controlled blood glucose levels.

Complications of diabetes include:

- Blindness
- Loss of feeling, especially in the feet
- Kidney failure, requiring dialysis
- Heart attacks and stroke
- Amputations

Target blood glucose levels may vary between individuals depending on their age, duration of diabetes, existing complications, hypo risk and expected lifespan.

The importance of good nutrition

The highest dietary priority for frail, older people with diabetes is to ensure they get all the nourishment needed for health and wellbeing. Dietary restriction, for example the avoidance of sugar and desserts, often contributes to malnutrition and unnecessary weight loss and should be avoided. If blood glucose levels are too high, medical management is usually required, not dietary restriction.

Contact your local HACC dietitian to discuss training or inservice options for your service. Ask to have this newsletter emailed on PDF for you to use freely in your service and with your clients.

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What about sugar?

Current research tells us that avoiding sugar is no longer the focus for managing diabetes. The amount, type, distribution and rate of digestion of ALL carbohydrate is important for dietary management.

The risk of hypos

Low blood glucose levels (or hypoglycaemia) may occur with people who take certain types of medication for diabetes. Symptoms may include sweating, dizziness, shaking, confusion, lethargy, changes in behaviour, or hunger. One concern of hypos in older people is the risk of falls and injury.

Helping to prevent a hypo:

- Eat regular meals and between meal snacks.
- Include carbohydrate foods or drinks at each meal and snack.
- Have some extra carbohydrate before exercising or when being more active.
- If drinking alcohol: include carbohydrate foods and do not binge drink.

What can we do about it?

Good Nutrition

– Everyone's Business

HACC services, providing either domestic assistance or centre based care, are ideally positioned to pass on knowledge about good nutrition to clients. What can you suggest to your clients? Find out over the page.

To help manage diabetes follow these suggestions:



- Ensure the whole diet is nutritionally adequate. Particularly for older people, dietary restrictions are not recommended and weight loss should be avoided.
- Eat small, frequent meals and snacks (eg. eat about every 2 - 3 hours), especially if there is a risk of hypos.
- Know what foods contain carbohydrate and include these at each meal and snack. This “spreading out” of carbohydrate foods throughout the day helps to control blood glucose levels as well as provide nourishment.
- Include low glycaemic index (low GI) (slow digesting) carbohydrates as these also help to control and “even out” blood glucose levels.
- Enjoy sweet foods! The avoidance of sugar is not needed for good blood glucose control. Sweet desserts like milk-based puddings, custard and yoghurt are nourishing foods and can be eaten and enjoyed by people with diabetes, especially those who are underweight or frail.
- Sweets, treats and high energy foods and fluids may need to be limited for the overweight person if this extra body weight is a problem for mobility, function, wound healing, health issues or quality of life.

Carbohydrate foods include: (underlined foods are low GI)

Breads and Cereals

- all varieties of bread (grain, fruit, white), crumpets, English muffins
- breakfast cereals (All Bran, Guardian, Special K, Sustain, rolled oats, muesli),
- cereals eg barley, semolina, oats, polenta, cous cous, rice
- cereal products eg pasta, noodles, popcorn, rice cakes



Starchy Vegetables

- potato, sweet potato, corn, legumes, lentils



Fruit

- fresh, dried, canned, juice (apple, pear, plum, grapes, peach, orange, banana)

Dairy Products

- milk, yoghurt, custard, soy milk (not cheese)



Sweets and Treats

- ice cream, cake, scones, biscuits, pastries, soft drinks, cordials, confectionary