

Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is one of Aotearoa's fastest growing chronic diseases. Over 225,000 Kiwis are currently diagnosed with diabetes (mostly type 2 diabetes), and it is predicted that many more are currently undiagnosed or have pre-diabetes. This nutrition fact sheet provides information and tips on food, nutrition and lifestyle for people living with type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes: what happens?

Diabetes is a condition where there is too much glucose (or sugar) in the bloodstream. When we consume carbohydrate - starchy and sugary foods - our body breaks them down into glucose (the body's main energy source), which enters the bloodstream.

Insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas, is needed for the body's cells to take up glucose.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body's insulin is unable to work properly (a problem called insulin resistance) or when the body cannot produce enough insulin to maintain normal blood glucose levels.

The risk is higher in people who are overweight and inactive and diet and exercise are the first lines of treatment. But many people with type 2 diabetes will need oral medications and possibly insulin injection over time.

Often occurs along with other cardiovascular risk factors such as high cholesterol and blood pressure.

Type 2 diabetes is by far the most common form of diabetes, affecting 85-90% of all people with diabetes.

Key facts

- Usually diagnosed in older adults (over 40 years) but is becoming more common in children.
- More common in those who are carrying excess weight, particularly around the middle.
- In many cases, it can be prevented with a healthy lifestyle and weight loss/maintaining a healthy weight.
- Risk is increased in those with a family history of type 2 diabetes.
- Often occurs along with other cardiovascular risk factors such as high cholesterol and blood pressure.
- More prevalent amongst Maori, Asian, Middle Eastern and Pacific people.
- More common in women who had a large baby or had gestational diabetes during pregnancy or in women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).



More info:

You can check your risk online with the Diabetes New Zealand interactive tool. Answer eight questions to calculate your future risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

<https://www.diabetes.org.nz/are-you-at-risk>

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Food & nutrition tips:

There's plenty of confusing and conflicting information out there when it comes to good nutrition, particularly when you have diabetes. And while everyone's nutrition needs are slightly different, there are some basics that almost everyone will benefit from.

- Fill at least half of your plate at main meals with a variety of different coloured vegetables and salads – aim for at least five serves each day.

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- Choose fibre-rich low glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrate foods including minimally processed wholegrains (traditional or steel cut oats, low GI breakfast cereals, barley, freekeh, quinoa, bulghur/cracked wheat, dense wholegrain breads, lower GI varieties of brown rice such

as basmati, wholemeal or wholegrain pasta), legumes, sweetcorn and most fruits.

- Avoid processed meats, reduce red meat and instead choose more plant proteins such as legumes, tempeh and tofu. Include legumes (such as chickpeas, lentils and dried or canned beans) in your meals at least three times per week.

- Replace saturated fats (found in fatty meat, butter, full cream dairy, palm and coconut oil) with healthy fats from foods like extra-virgin olive oil, nuts, seeds and avocado.

- Snack on high fibre foods such as fresh fruit, unsalted nuts, hummus and wholegrain crackers, raw vegetables and roasted chickpeas instead of processed snack foods.

- Choose water as your main drink and avoid or limit sugar-sweetened drinks and fruit juices.

- Include healthy carbs in your diet. While low carb diets are often promoted for managing type 2 diabetes, this type of eating plan only addresses the symptoms of diabetes, and doesn't get to the root cause of the problem. Diets high in saturated fat and animal protein can worsen insulin resistance, the underlying cause of type 2 diabetes, so while they may give short term results, low-carb high-fat diets are not a good long-term option for managing diabetes.

Lifestyle tips

- **Move more and sit less.** Regular exercise helps to improve the way insulin works in the body and lowers blood glucose levels. Studies have also shown that breaking up prolonged sitting (even for a minute or two every 20-30 minutes) can improve insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance.

- **Reduce your waist measurement.** Carrying excess weight increases the risk of diabetes, particularly when it is around the middle. Aim for a waist measurement below 80cm for women or 94cm for men.

- **If you smoke, quit now.** Studies have shown that smokers are more insulin resistant and have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Smoking also increases the risk of diabetes-related complications, including heart disease.

- **Get a good night's sleep.** Lack of sleep has been shown to worsen insulin resistance and studies have shown that both sleep quality and quantity are related to diabetes risk. For those with diabetes, poor sleep can increase blood glucose levels and make diabetes harder to manage.

Connect with Sanitarium

Do you have a question about nutrition? If you're looking to find out how much iron you need in your diet or you would like some tips on how to encourage your family to eat a little healthier, Sanitarium's expert team of dietitians can help. Our free *Ask A Dietitian* service on our website offers general advice on how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Plus, subscribe to our *Recipe of the Week* and *Wholicious Living* newsletters. You'll receive weekly inspiration on healthy vegetarian recipes and a monthly mix of articles on health, wellbeing and nutrition.

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