

the bitter SWEET REALITY

Looking for a New Year's resolution? Seeing as the age limit of Asians with diabetes is getting lower, it's time, says ultimate wellbeing specialist Akcelina Cvijetic, to curb the sugar rush...

if you have a sweet tooth, the mid-morning usually means one thing – sugar rush! Time for something sweetlicious to accompany your morning tea or coffee. And what could be more heavenly than a chocolate bar with lunch and a dessert after dinner? The only problem is, frequent consumption of high amounts of sugar can lead to a severe blood sugar imbalance, and weight gain which in turn may lead to diabetes, a condition that has been on the rise among Asians – with an increasing number of young people being diagnosed with the illness. Kamlesh Khunti, a Professor of Primary Care Diabetes at the University of Leicester and a GP, said: 'Type 2 diabetes was not something that teenagers and children would get. It was something that adults in their 30s and 40s would be diagnosed with. But now children, particularly from the South Asian population, are getting type 2 diabetes at a younger and younger age. This is a shocking trend that is a time-bomb waiting to explode.'

What is diabetes?

Diabetes (diabetes mellitus) is a condition where the amount of the sugar glucose in the blood is high due to the body's inability to use it properly – meaning it cannot utilise insulin effectively or produce sufficient amounts.

Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas. Its job is to carry glucose out of the blood and into cells, where it is used as fuel for energy. If the insulin does not do its job properly or there isn't enough insulin about the result is too much glucose in the blood and not enough for the cells.

There are two main types of diabetes:

Type 1 (also known as insulin-dependent diabetes) because it results from the body's failure to produce insulin and requires daily insulin injections.

Type 2 results from insulin dependence, where cells fail to use insulin properly.

Symptoms

As a result of too much sugar in the blood, the rest of the body has to compensate for it. This can lead to symptoms such as raging thirst and frequent urination as the body tries to dilute the excess blood sugar by stimulating us to drink and eliminating surplus via urination. Other symptoms include weight gain or weight loss, thrush or genital itching, blurred vision, tiredness and slow healing of wounds.

Statistics

According to Diabetes UK, there are currently 2.6 million people diagnosed with diabetes in Great Britain. The number is predicted to rise to 4 million by 2025. In 2008 alone, 145,000 people were diagnosed with diabetes – equivalent to around three people every ten minutes, 17 people every hour and 400 people every day!

Who is at risk of diabetes?

The chances of developing diabetes depend on several factors; ethnicity, genes, obesity and lifestyle. Ethnicity plays a big role in terms of susceptibility. Diabetes, especially the type 2, is up to six times more common in people of South Asian descent. According to the Health Survey for England 2004, 'doctor-diagnosed diabetes is almost four times as prevalent in Bangladeshi men and almost three times as prevalent in Pakistani and Indian men compared with men in the general population. Among women, diabetes is more than five times as likely among Pakistani women, three times as likely in Bangladeshi women and two-and-a-half times as likely in Indian women, compared with women in the general population'.

Genes can increase the risk of developing the illness – if one or both parents have diabetes, the risk of a child developing it ranges from 2% to a staggering 75%.

Obesity has a strong association with diabetes. The build up of fat can stop insulin doing its job properly resulting in too much glucose in the blood stream.

Other factors, such as an inactive lifestyle can also contribute to a development of diabetes and its associated complications such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart attack, stroke, blindness, diabetic kidney disease, diabetic nerve disease, diabetic ketoacidosis, erectile dysfunction, infections of the skin and urinary tract.

Prevention and treatment

Prevention is better than cure. If you have any of the above-mentioned symptoms, see your GP. The following blood tests are used to diagnose diabetes: fasting blood glucose level, oral glucose tolerance test and non-fasting blood glucose level as well as urine analysis. Once the type of diabetes has been diagnosed by your doctor you will be prescribed necessary medication. In the case of type 1 diabetes this will mean daily insulin injections, which are critical for the proper management of this condition. Type 2 diabetes usually involves

prescription diabetic drugs. This type of diabetes is usually a consequence of poor eating habits and inactive lifestyle and as such can benefit immensely from dietary and lifestyle changes.

Balancing your blood sugar

What makes the levels unbalanced?

The main cause is eating too much sugar and sweet foods, especially those high in glucose such as fizzy drinks, chocolate bars and commercial honey. Malt sugar (maltose) found in grains falls in the same group. As a result, refined, commercial cereals and breads will have the same effect on your blood sugar levels. In the fruit group, bananas, grapes and dried fruit have the biggest effect. Root vegetables such as carrots, parsnips, potatoes are the sweetest vegetables. However, when cooked or processed they can have a considerable effect on blood sugar – instant mash potato can have as strong an effect as a Mars bar!

Alcohol is also high in sugar. Avoid it and other stimulants such as coffee, tea, fizzy drinks and cigarettes. If you can't do without these altogether, keep them to a minimum.

Balancing blood sugar levels

The best foods include lentils, beans, peas and chickpeas. They have a low glycemic load (GL) which in simple terms mean they have the lowest effect on blood sugar levels. Other good food choices include protein-rich food, meat, fish, eggs, dairy products, tofu, quinoa, nuts and seeds. Whole grains such as porridge oats also release their sugar content gradually. Raw vegetables or lightly steamed vegetables are also good as they are high in fibre which helps normalise blood sugar levels. Fruits tend to be high in natural sugar, but eating them with nuts and seeds as fibre helps normalise them. Opt for fruits such as berries and apples.

Sugar Alternatives

Honey and maple syrup are only marginally better alternatives to sugar. They will still have a considerable effect on your blood sugar levels. Artificial sweeteners aren't great either – some have been reported to have harmful effects on health. Good sugar alternatives include agave syrup or a good quality unprocessed honey bought from a health shop.

And remember, always consult your doctor before embarking on a new diet, or taking any kind of supplement.

• For more nutrition and wellbeing advice, log onto www.akcelina.com



**DIABETES ACTION PLAN
Top 10 dietary tips**

- 1. Eat less and often**
Space your main meals out evenly and try to have them at the same time every day. Snack on oatcakes, berries, nuts and seeds in between meals to keep the blood sugar levels balanced throughout the day.
- 2. Exercise portion control**
The bigger the plate, the more food you eat. The easiest way to lose weight is to have less food in front of you. Downsize food portions.
- 3. Wake up to porridge**
Porridge oats are a good breakfast choice for a diabetic. Choose organic, rough oat flakes, and spice it up with chopped apples and cinnamon powder. Delicious!
- 4. Use cinnamon & spice**
Research shows that having half a teaspoon of cinnamon a day has a great effect on balancing blood sugar levels. Turmeric is another great spice choice.
- 5. Eat whole foods**
Avoid white processed grains (white rice, white pasta and white bread). Choose whole grains, lentils, peas, beans, chickpeas, nuts, seeds, fresh fruit and vegetables.
- 6. Mix and match for best sugar control**
For example, eat your rice or potatoes with lentils, paneer or meat, never just with vegetables. If you are having something sweet, have some almonds or yoghurt with it.
- 7. Watch your drinks**
Drink plenty of water daily and dilute all fruit juices. Keep your alcohol and stimulant intake to a minimum.
- 8. Go for fish**
Cut out saturated fats and aim to eat oily fish such as mackerel, salmon and sardines three times a week. They contain healthy omega 3 fats, which help protect against heart disease.
- 9. Limit sugar, sugary and processed foods**
Keep any form of sugar and sugary foods to a minimum. To help curb your sugar cravings, try a chromium supplement. Always consult your doctor before starting any supplements, especially if on prescribed medication.
- 10. Keep active**
Exercise speeds up your metabolism which means you burn more calories. Find the exercise you enjoy and you will be more motivated to keep it up. Even 30 minutes of exercise a day can yield great results!

