



# NEWSletter

April 2008

## Dear Member

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## What is diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic, progressive disease in which impaired insulin production leads to high blood glucose levels. Insulin is a hormone that is made in the pancreas, which helps to regulate (lower) the level of blood glucose. If you have diabetes (which can occur at any age), your blood glucose level, commonly referred to as blood sugar, is too high.

There are two common forms of diabetes:

**Insulin dependent diabetes mellitus**, traditionally known as type 1 diabetes. This develops when there is a severe lack of insulin in the body, because most or all of the insulin producing cells in the pancreas are destroyed. About 10% of diabetics are classified as type 1.

**Non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus**, traditionally known as type 2 diabetes. This develops when the body still produces insulin, but the cells do not respond optimally to insulin, and do not take in glucose (sugar). This is also the most common form of diabetes in the diabetic population.

### What are the symptoms of diabetes?

Diabetes often goes undiagnosed because many of its symptoms seem so harmless. Recent studies indicate that the early detection of diabetes symptoms and treatment can decrease the /pg 2



# >> What is diabetes? (cont.)

chance of developing the complications of diabetes. Some diabetes symptoms include:

- frequent urination;
- excessive thirst;
- extreme hunger;
- unusual weight loss;
- increased fatigue;
- irritability; and
- blurry vision.

If you have one or more of these diabetes symptoms, consult your doctor.

## Risk factors involved in diabetes

Finding and treating diabetes early can prevent health problems later on. Many people with type 2 diabetes have no symptoms and do not know they have diabetes. Some people are at higher risk for diabetes than others. People at high risk include those who:

- have a strong family history of diabetes;

- are over 40 years of age;
- are obese (overweight);
- had diabetes during pregnancy;
- have high blood pressure and/or high cholesterol; and
- are inactive.

## Is diabetes life threatening?

People with poorly controlled diabetes can develop the following complications:

- Damage to the small blood vessels in the retina (inner layer of the eye) can lead to blindness.
- Changes may occur in the kidney structure, which prevents them from functioning well. This condition is usually without symptoms until kidney failure develops.
- Decreased sensation in the hands and feet, muscle weakness and weakness of limbs can lead to injuries, infections and destruction of joints.
- Angina, strokes and heart attacks may occur due to the effects of the blood sugar on heart blood vessels, as well as the effects on the control of blood cholesterol.
- Diabetics are prone to feet infections, which may take longer to heal.

## Can diabetes be treated?

At present there is no cure for diabetes. It can, however, be successfully controlled, allowing people with diabetes to lead a perfectly normal life. Knowledge about the disease, its treatment and the role of regular exercise and a correct diet are key to making diabetes manageable. The foundation of diabetes management rests on four factors, which are:

### 1. Exercise

Regular exercise not only improves general wellbeing, but also enhances the body's sensitivity to insulin. Exercise lowers the levels of blood glucose. It aids weight loss and lowers blood pressure. It must, however, be stressed that exercise must be carefully monitored to prevent possible low blood sugar, also known as hypoglycaemia. Individuals with poorly controlled diabetes should avoid strenuous exercise. Consult your doctor before starting any exercise programme.

### 2. Diet

The diabetic diet is a normal, healthy diet that is high in fibre and low in sugar and fat. Food directly affects blood glucose levels. It is therefore important to eat the right kind of food to stay healthy.



Here are some useful tips on following a practical diet:

- Eat regular meals with similar amounts of starchy foods (bread, potatoes, cereals) each day to keep blood glucose levels constant.
- Limit fried and fatty foods (butter, margarine, cheese and fatty meat).
- Avoid foods high in calories, as they may cause weight gain. Choose low fat spread cheeses, skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and lean meat.
- Eat more high fibre starchy foods (beans, peas, lentils, and fruits).
- Avoid sugar and very sweet foods (chocolates, sugary drinks, and cakes).
- Use salt sparingly.
- Drink alcohol in moderation and never on an empty stomach.

### 3. Blood glucose (sugar) monitoring

Measuring your blood glucose level regularly forms an important part of the effective management of diabetes. It helps you and your doctor to know what changes to make to your treatment and when to make them, thereby keeping your diabetes under control.

Maintaining a healthy blood glucose level helps to prevent long-term complications associated with diabetes, such as damage to the eyes and kidneys. Regular monitoring acts as an easy warning against blood glucose levels falling too low. There are two ways to do glucose monitoring: testing your glucose yourself with a home monitor (the blood glucose strip measurement) and/or having it tested at a laboratory. The latter is called the HbA1C test. This test shows how the blood glucose was controlled over the preceding three months. The following table provides guidelines for the optimum and acceptable blood glucose levels for the two tests:

Test		Optimum	Acceptable
Finger-stick blood glucose measurement	After fasting	4 to 6 mmol/L	6 to 8 mmol/L
HbA1C (%)		Less than 7%	7% to 8%

The advantages of blood glucose testing are:

- The exact blood glucose level can be measured at any time.
- It allows for immediate, appropriate action to be taken, if indicated.

### 4. Medication

If you have diabetes, it is essential that you have sufficient knowl-

edge of the disease and the way in which it is treated. Type 1 diabetes, for instance, is treated with insulin injections, a well-balanced diet and exercise. Combinations of diet, exercise and tablets are used to treat type 2 diabetes. Insulin may be required in some cases.

Since diabetes is treated with chronic medication in one form or another, it is particularly important that individuals understand how their medication works, how and when to take it, and what side-effects to expect.

### Caring for your feet

Below are some useful tips on how to take care of your feet, a problem area for many diabetes sufferers:

- Wash your feet daily; use warm water and soft soap.
- Dry feet gently, especially between the toes.
- Inspect your feet once a week, checking for redness, blisters, moist skin or cracks between the toes, cuts, scratches, or damaged nails.
- Decent footwear is very important for the diabetic person. Wearing slippers or tight-fitting shoes all day may result in harm to pressure areas on your foot.
- Do not walk barefoot. This may lead to injuries and infections that may take a long time to heal.
- Have your feet professionally examined by a podiatrist every six months.

With careful monitoring and commitment, diabetics can avoid complications and enjoy a long, productive life. By making an equally important commitment to reduce the risks of heart disease, an increased quality of life is possible. It is especially important to control weight, blood cholesterol and blood pressure, to do regular exercise, and to avoid smoking.

Learn all you can about the condition, your body's limits and what you can and cannot do. Identify trends in your blood sugar level patterns and make adjustments to your daily routine. Know what the symptoms of high or low blood glucose are and know what actions need to be taken in such situations.

Should you require more information, you are welcome to contact Qalsas Disease Risk Management at:

PO Box 15079  
Vlaeberg  
8018

Tel: (021) 480 4422

Website: [www.qalsas.co.za](http://www.qalsas.co.za)



## Why we need your and your dependants' ID numbers

In terms of the Medical Schemes Act, no. 131 of 1998, every medical scheme must provide each of its members with written proof of membership which contains at least the following particulars:

- surname;
- first name and other initials (if any);
- gender; and
- identity number of the member and of his/her registered dependants.

In order to comply with the Act, we request you to check your membership card. Where the identity numbers are outstanding, please forward copies of these identity documents to us, ensuring that your membership number is reflected on these documents.

Please fax them to (021) 480 4420.

## Notify us of any changes in your details

Members are obliged to notify Metropolitan Medical Scheme within 30 days of any change in membership due to:

- marriage;
- divorce;
- birth or adoption of children;
- change of address;
- children over 21 who may no longer qualify as child dependants;
- notice of termination; and
- death of a dependant.

Furthermore, Scheme membership will cease under the following conditions:

- on the date of termination of employment;
- when you join your spouse's medical scheme;
- in the event of a divorce (your spouse's dependent membership of the Scheme will be terminated);
- children who marry or who do not qualify due to the age or dependency qualification criteria for child dependency; and
- if you or your dependants are found guilty of abusing the benefits and privileges of the Scheme or of not paying amounts due to the Scheme.



# Health pointers

The Scheme would like to ensure that you remain healthy. Here are some practical pointers.

## Follow a healthy diet

- A healthy and balanced diet reduces your chances of getting heart disease.
- Learn which foods are good for you and try to include them in your diet.
- Try to eat less fatty foods and red meat, and eat lots of fruit, vegetables and foods containing fibre.

## Exercise and lose excess weight

- Regular exercise is very good for you.
- If you cannot get to the gym, you can always take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Turn everyday chores into a light workout.
- Jive and listen to music while you vacuum the carpets, or take your dog for a brisk walk.
- Remember to consult your doctor before doing any physical exercise.

## Reduce stress levels

Stress is not good for you. You can reduce stress by trying to do one thing at a time, developing a sense of humour, making an effort to improve important relationships, understanding your needs, treating people with respect and remembering that you always have a choice.

## Quit smoking

Besides the social, financial and physical disadvantages associated with it, smoking also increases your chances of developing all sorts of diseases. So why not quit while you are still ahead and increase your health?

## Drink lots of water

Often by increasing your water intake rather than reaching for over-the-counter medication, day-to-day complaints like back pain, chronic strains, stomach aches, headaches and fatigue can be relieved.

An easy way to remember to drink a beneficial amount

of water daily, is to drink a glass of water with every meal.

You can also keep a bottle filled with water nearby that has to be finished by the end of the day.



## Payment of claims

Please ensure that your claims are submitted by no later than the last day of the fourth month following the month during which the service was rendered. If the claim is received after this date, it will not be paid.

In order for you to reconcile your claims and payments, please check your claims statement to verify if your claims were processed.

The Scheme settles claims twice a month, after which claims statements that reflect the details of the payment are sent to members. You will only receive a claims statement if you submitted a claim.

Remember: You are responsible for payment of the medical account to the service provider.

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# *Important contact details*

## **Address**

Metropolitan Medical Scheme  
PO Box 15716  
Vlaeberg  
8018

## **Client Service Department**

Tel 0861 888 104 or (021) 480 4414  
Fax (021) 480 4420  
E-mail [metromed@mhg.co.za](mailto:metromed@mhg.co.za)  
Internet [www.mhg.co.za](http://www.mhg.co.za)

## **Metropolitan Health Group/ KPMG Fraud Hotline**

0800 200 564

## **Hospital pre-authorisation**

0861 888 309 or (021) 480 4923

## **Chronic medicine enquiries**

0861 888 104 or (021) 480 4414

## **Disease Risk Management**

0861 888 109 or (021) 480 4422

## **HIV & AIDS Risk Management**

0861 888 300 or (021) 480 4804

Members residing in the Cape Town area are encouraged to make use of the telephone numbers starting with "480" instead of "0861" as the former is more cost-effective for local callers.

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