

Measuring the benefits of weight management

Australia's Health 2008, the recently released report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), provided mostly good news; but bad news in one significant respect.

Worldwide, diabetes has reached epidemic proportions, and that epidemic has spread to Australia.

It's been conservatively estimated that 1 million Australians are affected by diabetes and this number could double over the next 12 years.

Uncontrolled diabetes poses a serious threat to our health and well being. Complications can include blindness, kidney failure and particularly increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Globally, it kills someone every 12 seconds.

In these days of greater awareness of health issues generally, most of us probably have a pretty good idea of what our blood pressure is; and many of us know our blood cholesterol levels as well. Certainly, nearly everyone knows what a reasonable cholesterol reading should be.

However, how many of us know the healthy range of blood glucose levels?

The interrelationship between heart disease and diabetes is now well established; so knowing not only your blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels, but also your blood glucose levels (BGL) becomes even more important.

We know there are two major forms of diabetes – type 1 and type 2.

Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in childhood or young adulthood and is one of the most common childhood diseases in developed countries. It is thought to occur when the body's immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas gland. Because the body stops making insulin, people with this form of diabetes need daily insulin injections.

However, type 1 diabetes represents only about 10-15% of all cases of diabetes. The majority of cases are type 2 whereby insulin is still produced by the pancreas, but for some reason it doesn't work effectively.

Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in adults over the age of 45, but increasingly it is occurring at a younger age. If you have a close relative with diabetes, you are at greater risk yourself; and lifestyle factors such as an unhealthy diet and lack of exercise are known to make type 2 diabetes even more likely.

Of course, diabetes is not a new condition. The symptoms were recognised by the ancient Egyptians as far back as 3,500BC. In 150AD the Greek physician Aretaeus first used the word diabetes and 1,600 years later Scottish doctor William Cutler added the word "mellitus" – Latin for honey.

Early methods of monitoring the severity of "sugar diabetes" depended on measuring glucose levels in urine. But this "dipstick" method gave unreliable results. Now the miniaturised, mobile phone sized blood glucose meters offer a convenient, accurate and reproducible way of determining the best possible treatment.

Self monitoring of blood glucose levels is considered necessary for all people with diabetes type 1, and type 2, if being treated with insulin. The need for blood glucose monitoring in people with type 2 diabetes being managed by just diet, exercise and oral medication, is debatable. Certainly the required frequency of testing is not so great; but there is no doubt self testing empowers the person with diabetes to be in control of their own condition.

Pharmacists providing the Self Care health information have fact cards titled *Diabetes type 1* and *Diabetes type 2*, and you can also get advice about the benefits of knowing your BGL. Phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772 for the nearest location of your Self Care pharmacy.