

Blue buildings for Diabetes Day

Over 500 major buildings and monuments worldwide will be lit blue on or around 14 November to commemorate World Diabetes Day.

World Diabetes Day is celebrated every year at this time. It was established over 15 years ago by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) to co-ordinate education and awareness programs worldwide.

It might seem almost unnecessary to have to raise awareness of diabetes, yet diabetes is fast reaching epidemic proportions. In fact, diabetes is the fourth main cause of death in most developed countries. Recent figures from the World Health Organisation indicate that more than 3 million deaths throughout the world are attributable to diabetes each year; numbers comparable to the most deadly of infectious diseases – AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Today, more than 240 million people worldwide are living with diabetes. Within 20 years, this number is expected to grow to 380 million. Children certainly are not spared from this global epidemic, with its debilitating and life-threatening complications.

So this year World Diabetes Day is focusing on diabetes in children and adolescents, and sets out to establish the message that no child should die of diabetes.

Diabetes is a condition where the body can't use glucose properly – usually because of a lack of insulin or so-called insulin resistance when the body fails to respond to its own insulin. Insulin is the chemical messenger or hormone that controls the uptake of glucose by muscles, liver and fat tissues.

Diabetes is generally classified as type 1 and type 2. Type 1 diabetes, previously known as insulin-dependent diabetes, usually affects children and young adults. With type 1 diabetes our bodies don't produce sufficient insulin, so this must be replaced with daily injections.

We don't know yet the exact cause of type 1 diabetes but we do know it has a strong family link. However, it can only occur when something such as a viral infection triggers the immune system to destroy the insulin-making cells in the pancreas. This is called an auto-immune reaction. While the cause of type 1 diabetes has nothing to do with lifestyle, a healthy lifestyle is very important in helping to manage the condition.

In type 2 diabetes which accounts for about 85% of all people with diabetes, insulin is still produced but for some reason it doesn't work effectively. While it most often affects mature adults, more and more younger people, even children, are getting type 2 diabetes. It's very much a lifestyle disease, and more young people are getting type 2 diabetes because more young people are getting fatter sooner.

The Federal Government has recently begun a \$30 million awareness, education and prevention campaign to tackle obesity. The Measure Up campaign encourages people to measure their waist to tell if they are at risk of developing a lifestyle-related chronic disease.

For most Australians, a waist measurement of more than 94 centimetres for men and 80 centimetres for women puts you at an increased risk of developing a chronic disease.

The risk is greatly increased if waist management is over 102 centimetres for men and 88 centimetres for women. Excess weight around the stomach is a likely sign of internal fat deposits around organs. The location of fat can be an important sign of the risk of developing ongoing health problems.

The campaign will also provide people with facts about lifestyle choices and promotes physical activity and healthy eating to reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes.

You can get more immediate advice on diabetes and how to maintain a healthy weight from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society's health information. Phone 1300 369 772 from the nearest location; and ask for the fact cards *Diabetes, Exercise and the Heart* and *Weight and Health*. And keep your eye out for those blue buildings.