

# 65+ YEARS OLD: KEEPING WELL WITH YOUR TYPE 2 DIABETES



## ➤ WHY IS THIS LEAFLET FOR YOU?

For many people, reaching the age of 65 and over can mean your life changes in many ways:

- You may have stopped working or reduced your working hours.
- Your family has grown up and you have more time for yourself.
- You may have grand-children and want to spend time with them.
- You now have time to do the hobbies you have never had time to do before.
- You may have more time to enjoy life generally.

**Don't let your diabetes get in the way!** This leaflet gives you some advice on how to look after yourself and your diabetes in this new phase of your life.

**Looking after yourself now will keep you well later!**



## ➤ YOUR LIFE AND DIABETES: A TIME OF CHANGE?

If you have had diabetes for a while, you may notice this has changed too. You may be worrying about:

- Your diabetes becoming worse as you get older
- Needing more tablets or starting injections
- Having hypos (low blood glucose) especially if you are a driver
- Having problems with your eyesight
- Becoming forgetful and not remembering to take your tablets regularly
- Developing diabetes complications such as kidney and foot problems



## ➤ ON THE MOVE: KEEPING ACTIVE

As you get older, there is a tendency to gain weight around your waist. This makes your body less sensitive to the insulin produced by your pancreas. Your own insulin is therefore less effective at controlling your blood glucose and may mean you need an increase in medication to keep your HbA1c in target.

Muscle mass and strength diminishes over time. Diabetes can make this more likely. Muscles play an important part in controlling blood glucose so loss in muscle function can make it more difficult to keep your HbA1c in target.

The good news is that by keeping active, you can help to keep your weight down and strengthen your muscles. Keeping active has a number of other benefits. It can:

- Help to control blood glucose and blood pressure
- Reduce your risk of falls by improving balance and mobility
- Reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke
- Lift your mood and improve mental well-being
- Help to reduce forgetfulness and risk of developing dementia
- Improve sleep patterns
- Strengthen bones so reducing risk of fractures

Activities to strengthen muscles should include resistance and endurance exercise. Walking, swimming, stair-climbing, and stationary cycling are examples. Start gently and gradually build up the intensity and frequency. Moderate exercise should make you feel warm, breathe more quickly, and make your pulse increase but you should still be able to talk! Get advice from your doctor or nurse if you have other health conditions or are usually very sedentary. He or she may also be able to refer you to an exercise trainer for advice and support.

**!** Find something you enjoy: you are more likely to stick with it!

Make sure you wear comfortable socks and shoes that support your feet when exercising. If you have had diabetes for a long time, you may have damage to the nerves and blood vessels supplying your feet. Shoes and socks that rub or cause pressure can result in blisters or sores to your feet which you may not be aware of until the damage is done. Seek advice about suitable activities from your podiatrist if you have an on-going foot problem.

## ➤ EATING WELL:

Everyone should aim to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. No single food contains all the essential nutrients needed to keep our bodies in good condition, which is why it is important to eat a variety of foods. There is no need for a diabetic diet or diabetic food products. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet will help you to:

- Achieve and maintain your ideal body weight
- Control your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol
- Reduce or slow down the need for more medication such as tablets or injections
- Strengthen bones
- Improve muscle health
- Reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke
- Give you energy to get the most out of life

Try to eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. These can be fresh, frozen, dried and canned. They are low in fat and calories, high in vitamins and minerals, and contain fibre for bowel health. If you take a statin, avoid grapefruit. Some vegetables may interfere with the action of Warfarin. Seek advice from your pharmacist.

Include a small portion of starchy foods with each meal. These break down to glucose for energy. Wholegrain versions can help to keep you feeling full and slows the release of glucose helping to control blood glucose levels. Choose low-fat dairy products as a source of calcium for bone health. Protein foods (meat, fish, chicken, eggs, nuts and pulses) are needed to maintain muscle mass and strength.





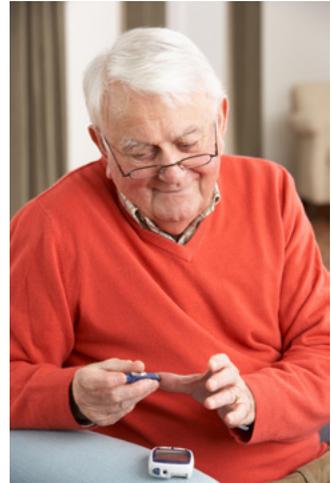
- ❗ See your dentist if dental problems prevent you from eating a healthy diet, particularly chewing high fibre foods like fruit and vegetables. Gum disease can be a cause of poorly controlled blood glucose but can also be caused by a high HbA1c. If you have difficulty swallowing or your appetite is affected by the side effects of medication, see your doctor for advice.

## ➤ YOUR DIABETES MEDICATION:

Many people find that, as they get older, they need to take more tablets especially if they have more than one health condition. Diabetes can become more difficult to manage as time progresses so your medication may need to change to keep pace with this. Taking your diabetes medication regularly, in the right way, at the right time, can slow down the progression of your diabetes and the need for more tablets or moving on to injections.

- Ask for a medicines review from your pharmacist to find out how all your tablets work, learn about possible side effects and make sure you know how to take your medication correctly
- Discuss with your doctor if there are tablet combinations available that can reduce your pill load, or tablets that can be taken once daily instead of more frequently

Insulin injections and some diabetes tablets can cause hypoglycaemia ("hypo" or low blood glucose). If you are not sure, check with your pharmacist to see if you are taking tablets that have this side effect. If you are, you should carry glucose at all times and be familiar with the symptoms of a hypo. Be aware that your usual symptoms may change as you get older. If you have concerns about the risk of hypoglycaemia, or think you are having episodes of low blood glucose, discuss this with your doctor or nurse. There are a number of diabetes treatments that have a very low risk of causing hypoglycaemia and one of these may be a suitable alternative for you. These treatments also have the advantage of not requiring you to test your blood glucose.



Although most people should aim to keep their HbA<sub>1c</sub> less than 58 mmol/mol, this may not be ideal or possible for everyone. Depending on your age, circumstances and other health conditions you may have, your targets may be relaxed as you get older. However, it is still important to avoid symptoms of high blood glucose (tiredness, thirst, dry mouth, and passing urine frequently) and the development of complications. Discuss what the ideal target is for you with your diabetes doctor or nurse.

## > KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR DIABETES:

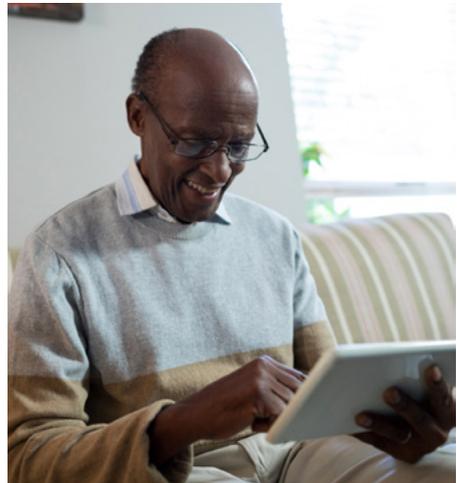
65+ can be a time of great change. Your activity, stress levels and eating habits may be very different especially if you have given up or reduced work, have more leisure time, and are more active. As your lifestyle changes, you may find your diabetes changes too. Attending your annual diabetes review will help you, and your doctor or nurse, to keep you well and your diabetes controlled.

The annual diabetes review is an opportunity to:

- Agree the right targets for your HbA1c, blood pressure and cholesterol
- Know your numbers and find out if you are meeting your targets
- Recognise risk factors for developing diabetes complications so these can be managed to reduce your risk of getting problems
- Discuss your treatment options
- Find support to make healthy lifestyle changes
- Identify early signs of diabetes complications so they can be treated quickly
- Learn more about your diabetes
- Let your doctor know if you are feeling low in mood

Everyone with diabetes should have the opportunity to attend a structured diabetes education programme. You are never too old to learn more about your diabetes! It is also an opportunity to meet other people with diabetes, share ideas for living with the condition, and keep up to date. Your nurse will be able to give you details of a course near you.

If being in a group does not appeal to you, there are numerous leaflets and websites available. Details are available on the back of this leaflet.



## > SOME USEFUL QUESTIONS:

Here are some questions you may find useful to ask when visiting your diabetes doctor or nurse.

- ❓ What are my blood pressure, cholesterol and HbA1c levels? What is right for me?
- ❓ How does my diabetes medication work?
- ❓ Will this tablet cause low blood glucose levels or weight gain?
- ❓ Do I need to test my blood glucose?
- ❓ I would like to be more active. What advice can you give me?
- ❓ I would like to learn more about my diabetes. What is available?



## > USEFUL RESOURCES:

TREND-UK: [www.trend-uk.org](http://www.trend-uk.org)

Diabetes UK: [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)

Diabetes UK: ☎ 0345 123 2399

Age UK: [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

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