

Session 11

Preventing diabetes

The aim of the session is to understand:

- ✓ What diabetes is.
- ✓ The difference between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.
- ✓ How common diabetes is.
- ✓ The effect of diabetes on your heart.
- ✓ Practical tips on how to control your diabetes.

The information you need to get across is:

 10 minutes

What is diabetes?

Normally our body produces glucose (sugar) when we digest food. The cells in the body use the glucose for energy. A hormone called **insulin** helps the glucose to enter the cells, which helps to regulate how much glucose is in the blood.

Diabetes develops when the body doesn't produce enough insulin, or when the insulin that is made doesn't work effectively. This leads to an abnormally high level of glucose in the blood.

How are Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes different?

Type 1 diabetes is when the body is unable to make **any** insulin. This usually happens in children and young adults.

Type 2 diabetes, which is more common, is when **not enough** insulin is produced, or when the insulin **doesn't work** properly. It:

- tends to develop gradually as people get older – usually after the age of 40
- is closely linked with being overweight and being physically inactive
- is more common in people with a family history of diabetes.

How common is diabetes?

Over two and a half million adults have been diagnosed with diabetes in the UK¹. However, this number is increasing all the time, and it is worrying that Type 2 diabetes is now being diagnosed more in younger people. This is mainly due to unhealthy eating habits and increasingly sedentary lifestyles.

South Asians and some African Caribbeans living in the UK have a higher risk of developing diabetes than other people in the UK. And for some groups, the risk is particularly high. For example, compared to the general population:

- African Caribbean and Indian men are twice as likely to develop diabetes
- African Caribbean and Pakistani women are two and a half times more likely¹.

However Black African women have a lower incidence than the general population.

Checklist



Session time:
20 minutes

You will need

- Training card 11
- Visual card 11



- Summary sheet 11 (parts a and b)





How does diabetes affect your heart?

Diabetes significantly increases the risk of coronary heart disease and can cause other serious health problems, too. People with diabetes have three times the risk of a heart attack of those who do not have diabetes¹⁸.

Diabetes damages the heart in several ways:

- High glucose levels in the blood affect the walls of the arteries, making them more likely to develop atheroma.
- Diabetes increases the damage done by the major risk factors of smoking, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol.
- People with Type 2 diabetes often have higher triglyceride levels and lower levels of HDL cholesterol (the 'protective' type of cholesterol).
- People with diabetes are more likely to have high blood pressure.
- Diabetes can affect the heart muscle itself, making it pump less efficiently.
- Diabetes can affect the nerves to the heart, so that the symptoms of heart disease are not felt in the usual way. This leads to delay and difficulties in diagnosis.

During a risk assessment, your doctor or nurse may do a blood test to check your glucose level to check for diabetes.

Practical tips on how to control diabetes

Control your blood glucose

Set yourself a routine so that you eat meals and measure your blood glucose level at regular times.

Keep to a healthy weight and body shape

If you're overweight, losing weight will help you control your diabetes. (For more information on losing weight, see Session 13 on page 71.)

Eat a healthy, balanced diet

- Eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Reduce the total amount of fat you eat.
- Cut down on saturated fats and trans fats.
- Replace saturated fats with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.
- Eat one or two portions of fish a week. (One of the portions should be oily fish.)
- Eat high-fibre, wholegrain foods.
- Cut down on salt.

Get active

Physical activity can help you to manage your blood glucose level. Build up to doing 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a day, on at least five days a week. The activity should make you feel warm and breathe slightly more heavily than usual, but you should still be able to talk. Ask your healthcare professional about which type of activity is best for you. If you have diabetes, you should make sure that you have a healthy snack with you when you exercise. This is to make sure that your blood sugar does not alter significantly.

Control your blood cholesterol and blood pressure

High cholesterol and high blood pressure are more common in people with diabetes. It's important that you make lifestyle changes to help control these, and take your doctor's advice and any medicines your doctor prescribes for you.

If you don't have diabetes, reduce your risk of developing it

You can greatly reduce your risk of developing diabetes by staying a healthy weight and body shape, doing regular physical activity and making sure that you do not eat food that is high in sugar.

Pre-session preparation

Print out *Summary sheet 11 (parts a and b)* 

Activities

Key activity: Preventing diabetes discussion (whole group)

 10 minutes

Discuss preventing diabetes with the group. Ask them the following questions:

1. What factors can you identify that might indicate a risk of developing Type 2 diabetes?

- Age – Type 2 diabetes tends to develop gradually as people get older – usually after the age of 40.
- Being overweight.
- Being physically inactive.
- Family history of diabetes.
- Ethnicity – South Asians and African Caribbeans living in the UK have a higher risk of developing diabetes than the general population.

2. If you don't have diabetes, what steps can you take to reduce your risk of developing it?

- Do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity five days a week.
- Maintain a healthy body weight and shape.
- Reduce the amount of food and drink you consume that is high in sugar.

3. Make a list of food that you generally eat as a 'treat'. Why should you limit or avoid these?

- Food which is high in sugar or saturated fat should be limited or swapped for healthier options which are lower in saturated fat and sugar.

At the end of the session

Hand out *Summary sheet 11 (parts a and b)* 

Background information

Although you now have all the basic information you need to deliver Session 11, here's some more information you might find useful.

- Having diabetes can make it more difficult to diagnose a heart attack. For example, having no pain but a general feeling of being unwell or sweating can be a symptom of a heart attack, but in people with diabetes these symptoms can be confused with the symptoms of a hypoglycaemic episode (sometimes called a 'hypo'), making the diagnosis more difficult. A hypo happens when the level of glucose in the blood falls too low. When this happens, the person may get symptoms such as sweating, feeling shaky, feeling his or her heart pounding, and confusion.
- If you have diabetes and are not sure if certain symptoms are due to hypoglycaemia or a heart attack, it is useful to do a blood glucose test. If you are unsure about your symptoms you should **call 999**.

For more information

bhf.org.uk

BHF booklets:

Diabetes and your heart (in English)

Diabetes and how it affects your heart (aimed at South Asians, in English and five South Asian languages)

To order these free resources, call the **BHF Orderline** on **0870 600 6566**.

Other organisations:

Diabetes UK Careline: **0845 120 2960** Website: www.diabetes.org.uk Email: info@diabetes.org.uk