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## DIABETES

To have diabetes or be at risk of developing this disease is a very serious condition.

Dr Larry Distiller, founder and managing director of the Centre for Diabetes and Endocrinology in Johannesburg, states that 'diabetes complications are serious and include heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney failure and sometimes even the need for amputation. In most cases these complications could have been avoided entirely by early diagnosis and proper treatment.'

The good news is that good lifestyle choices help the prevention and management of the disease. This includes eating healthily, regular exercise, getting enough rest and managing your mood.



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## 1. NUTRITION

In the past there was a belief that diabetics needed to eat a boring and bland diet. This is not so, the general principles of a healthy diet apply to everyone including diabetics, but with a few points to pay special attention to, particularly with the selection of the correct carbohydrates and fats.

Before changing to an improved eating plan, it is important to consult your doctor to check whether you need to adjust your medication. This is because when you make better food choices, it enables the body to self-regulate the blood sugar levels.

Carbohydrates with a low GI means that the sugar in the carbohydrate food is released slowly.

By eating small quantities of good carbohydrates five times a day, the blood sugar level will remain constant and at an optimum level.

The recommended foods also tend to be high in fibre, and this is important as the fibre helps to stabilise the blood sugar and insulin levels. So focus on fibrous vegetables like broccoli, spinach and green beans. Pulses are also good for you such as beans, chickpeas and lentils. By eating in a way that maintains a stable blood sugar level, the prescribed medication can then be more accurate and the risk of over/under supply of insulin is reduced.

The link between obesity and diabetes is so strong that a new term has been coined: 'diabesity'. Because diabetes is so often associated with obesity, it is really important to eat the right type and quantity of carbohydrates, and also to pay attention to the quality and quantity of fats eaten.

For diabetics, as well as those with heart conditions, it is important to stay away from fats that come from animal sources. Pay special attention to removing all skin and fat from meat before cooking it and preferably steam or dry-fry rather than use oil to cook. Select fat-free dairy products where you can. Ensure that you eat enough good fats on a daily basis, such as olives, avocado, nuts and olive oil. While these are important to your health you need to watch the portion size, as a serving is the size of two fingers. Women should have three servings per day and men five. Another good source of healthy fats is oily fish, like fresh tuna, trout and salmon, mackerel (smoked or fresh), canned sardines and pilchards.



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## 2. EXERCISE EXERCISE EXERCISE

As the risk of further complications is so high with diabetes, it is important to do everything possible to counter these risks. Exercise plays a crucial preventative role. The doctor will advise on the most appropriate amount of exercise, depending on the impact the disease is having on the body. A biokineticist and fitness trainer would be helpful in translating the doctor's advice into a suitable exercise and fitness plan. Exercising by yourself can be lonely, so get an exercise buddy for motivation.



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## 3. MANAGING MOOD



We have all heard the saying, laughter is the best medicine, and now according to Japanese scientists this is true. Many studies have shown how our mood influences our body chemistry. Diabetics who watched a comedy after dinner experienced lower blood sugar levels than others who listened to a boring lecture. Learning and practicing techniques for meditation and relaxation would have a similar effect.

## 4. SLEEP

Sleep is when our body takes time to recover and repair and there is growing evidence that too little sleep can affect hormones and metabolism in ways that promote diabetes. Eight hours of good rest each night would be ideal.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS



Eat a low-fat, high-fibre diet including plenty of raw fruits and vegetables, as well as fresh vegetable juices. This reduces the need for insulin and also lowers the level of fats in the blood. Fibre helps to reduce blood sugar surges. For snacks, eat oat or rice bran crackers with nut butter or cheese. Legumes, root vegetables and whole grains are also good. Remember to regulate your complex carbohydrate intake.

Supplement your diet with spirulina as it helps to stabilise blood sugar levels. Other foods that help normalise blood sugar include berries, brewer's yeast, dairy products (especially cheese), egg yolks, fish, garlic, kelp, sauerkraut, soybeans and vegetables.

Avoid tobacco in any form, it constricts the blood vessels and inhibits circulation. Keep your feet clean, dry and warm, and wear only white cotton socks and well-fitting shoes. Lack of oxygen (because of poor circulation) and peripheral nerve damage (with loss of pain sensation) are major factors in the development of diabetic foot ulcers. Try to avoid injury, and take measures to improve the circulation in the feet and legs.

Coronary heart disease is common in people with diabetes. Women with diabetes are particularly at risk. Elevated blood glucose in long-term diabetes is the primary factor that adversely affects the heart in people with diabetes.

It is vital for people who have diabetes to take care of their feet. Nerve damage can lead to lack of sensation in the feet, and once the skin is broken, sores there may not heal.



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