

Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic disease characterised by high blood glucose levels. This occurs when there is not enough or no insulin being produced by the pancreas. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas which transports the glucose from the blood stream in to the body cells where it is stored or used for energy.

There are two main types of diabetes - type 1 and type 2. Type 1 occurs when the pancreas no longer produces the insulin the body requires and usually occurs before the age of 40. Type 1 represents 10 to 15 per cent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. Type 2 occurs when the pancreas is not producing enough insulin or when the insulin is not working effectively. Lifestyle factors and a genetic predisposition can contribute to the development of type 2 diabetes which represents 85 to 90 per cent of all diagnosed cases. At present there is no cure for either type.

Diabetes can cause a number of complications:

- Eye disease - diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in Australians aged less than 60 years. Its development is related to the length of time diabetes has been present and the degree of blood glucose control. It can be prevented. Some other eye problems can occur more frequently with diabetes, such as cataracts
- Kidney disease - diabetes is one of the most common causes of end stage renal Disease
- Lower limbs - neuropathy or peripheral nerve disease and vascular damage may lead to leg ulcers and serious foot problems, from which amputation can result
- Heart disease/stroke - diabetes is often associated with high blood pressure and high blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides), which greatly increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Diabetes is increasingly common in Australia. A survey conducted in 1999–2000, the Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study, revealed approximately 940,000 Australians aged 25 or over with either Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes.¹ It is estimated that 100,000 Australians are developing diabetes each year.²

RDNS Diabetes Clinical Nurse Consultants work with clients in the following ways to help them better manage their diabetes:

- Provide direct diabetes self-management education, support and health monitoring
- Insulin stabilisation, blood glucose monitoring, medication management
- Link to other service providers, and support services such as Diabetes Australia, local community diabetes support groups etc

- Support RDNS generalist staff in the delivery of appropriate, evidence based diabetes care
- Work with other health professionals involved in care such as GP, podiatrist, Endocrinologist.

The Diabetes Clinical Leadership Group (CLG) ensures that RDNS' clinical services in diabetes conform to recognised 'best practice' via an evidence-based framework.–The CLG uses utilises members clinical expertise in diabetes management and also consults external experts, to continually review products and approaches to care, while initiating appropriate research projects.

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1. AIWH (2002) Diabetes: Australian Facts 2002
2. Healy, J (2007) Diabetes: Issues in Society Volume 250. Spinney Press