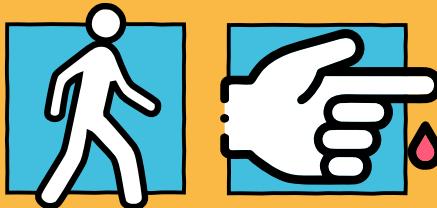


## Health guide

# Diabetes



### What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition that causes a person's blood sugar to become too high.

### There are 2 types of diabetes:

**Type 1 diabetes** is where the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin.

**Type 2 diabetes** is where the body does not produce enough insulin, or the body's cells do not react to insulin.

Diabetes can be very serious if not managed. It increases your risk of other health conditions including heart disease, stroke, dementia, nerve damage, foot ulcers, blindness, chronic kidney disease, skin problems, blood circulation difficulties, muscle wasting and damage to your joints.

The good news is there are lots and lots of good medications that can help control type 2 diabetes and new technology that makes type one diabetes easier to monitor.



## What are the symptoms of diabetes?

- Feeling very thirsty.
- Feeling very hungry (even though you are eating).
- Going to the toilet (urine) more frequently than usual.
- Sudden weight or muscle loss.
- Itching around penis or vagina.
- Blurred vision.
- Extreme tiredness.
- Cuts or bruises that are slow to heal.
- Tingling pain or numbness in your hands or feet.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms and think you might have diabetes you should see a GP. **Everyone has the right to see a GP. You do not need ID or a fixed address to register with a GP and your immigration status does not matter.**

## How can I prevent diabetes?

- Eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- Regular exercise.
- Reduce alcohol consumption.
- Reduce tobacco consumption (smoking).

**The risk of developing type 2 diabetes increases if you are older, overweight, have high blood pressure, have a family history of diabetes, or are Black African or Black Caribbean.**



## I have diabetes, how can I manage it?

If you need support to manage your diabetes and follow the advice below, try to speak to a professional your trust such as a nurse, GP, Key Worker or advocate.

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Keep active.
- Take the medication recommended by your GP. If you are not on medication, you should discuss the options with a GP.
- Have annual check-ups with your GP or diabetes nurse.
- Have an eye screening at least once a year – diabetes increases your risk of blindness.
- If you drink alcohol, avoid drinking on an empty stomach as this can result in a 'hypo' (when glucose levels go too low). Alcohol can also interfere with medications. Beer and wine is very high in sugar so should be avoided if you have diabetes.

## Quotes from peers with lived experience of homelessness:

“Since I was diagnosed, I've been in touch with a dietitian. He gave me advice on what to eat so I don't eat the fat off meat or skin off chicken. I've lost 10 pounds so they're happy.”

“I know for myself that when I was on the street, I would want to have a beer so I would miss my medication. You have got to start making the right choices for yourself.”

## More information and support



Contact Diabetes UK:

- Call 0345 123 2399 Monday to Friday 9am – 6pm (England, Wales, and Northern Ireland)
- Call 0141 212 8710 Monday to Friday 9am – 6pm (Scotland)
- Email [helpline@diabetes.org.uk](mailto:helpline@diabetes.org.uk)

*Sources: Diabetes UK and NHS England*



[www.groundswell.org.uk](http://www.groundswell.org.uk)  
Socials: @ItsGroundswell

Everyone has the right to good health and to access healthcare. People experiencing homelessness face health inequalities, they are often excluded from information and services. That's why Groundswell produces accessible health guidance for people experiencing homelessness, so they can make informed decisions about their health.

All our health guides are created alongside people with experience of homelessness and reviewed by relevant professionals.