

Holiday travel

Having diabetes won't affect your holiday if you plan ahead. Here are some tips to ensure you have a great time away:

- Check the type of insulin that will be available - names and strengths vary
- Learn a phrase to get help if you should need it
- Carry some form of diabetes identification, in case you are ill or need to respond to questions at customs
- Carry a letter in which your GP explains the type of insulin you use
- Ensure your insurance covers pre-existing medical conditions as well as emergencies.

The journey

- Consider if you would like a diabetic meal on the boat or plane and ensure you order it
- Store insulin in your hand luggage, as it can freeze in the hold of a plane
- When crossing time zones keep your injections and meals to your own watch times. Change your watch on arrival and on return home
- If you travel west, the day is longer so you may need more food. If you travel east the day is shorter, so you may need to adjust your meals and insulin accordingly
- Travelling can sometimes involve delays - always carry snacks for emergencies.

Hot climates

- Keep insulin cool and out of direct sunlight
- Monitor sugar levels - warm weather can cause blood sugar levels to drop and less medication may be needed
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Do not walk barefoot on hot sand or other surfaces which could cause blisters to your feet.

This literature is produced as an acknowledgement of the life and work of Desmond and Hildergard Atherton. Desmond worked as a GP in Coventry and Hildergard was a founder Trustee of Coventry Churches Housing Association (now Touchstone Housing Association) and The ExtraCare Charitable Trust. Desmond's strength and patience towards those in his care and Hildergard's commitment and support to our charity's work have influenced the development of well-being service that is now benefiting our residents.



Learn more about
diabetes

take extra care of your health



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What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a common condition which is caused when the pancreas no longer produces enough insulin, or when the body does not use the insulin that is produced properly. Insulin controls the amount of sugar in our blood which is then converted into energy. We get sugar in the form of glucose from sweet foods or starchy foods, such as bread or potatoes.

Who gets diabetes?

Around 1.4 million people in the UK have been diagnosed with diabetes - and most of them are over 55. Experts claim that another million people suffer in silence, accepting the symptoms of the illness as inevitable consequences of 'old age'. The good news is that diabetes can be managed and treated effectively.

What are the symptoms?

Most older diabetics have what is termed 'Type 2' diabetes. Symptoms include thirst and a dry mouth, passing more and large amounts of urine, extreme tiredness, weight loss and blurred vision. This type of diabetes often creeps up slowly; symptoms are not always severe and sometimes people feel generally unwell and attribute symptoms to other causes.

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Is diabetes serious?

Diabetes is a leading cause of death by disease. If it is left untreated or unmanaged, high levels of blood sugar can damage the body's blood vessels, resulting in a variety of complications:

- Heart disease
- Limb amputations
- Blindness
- Impotency
- Kidney disease

Treatment

Diabetes is easily treated in most cases and most older people with the disease are able to keep it under control by healthy eating, medication or insulin injections. The aim of the treatment is not to cure the disease, but to control blood sugars and bring these levels back to normal to prevent complications.

A doctor or diabetic specialist nurse will be able to advise you of your target blood sugar levels.

Improve your health

You can help to prevent the complications of diabetes by:

- eating a healthy and balanced diet
- losing weight, if you are over weight
- regular exercise
- stopping smoking
- having regular check-ups
- keeping a close eye on yourself.

If you notice anything unusual, such as unusual cuts, marks, discolouration or blisters on your feet, consult your GP or chiropodist.

Food for thought...

Some tips to help control your diabetes:

- Eat regular meals. Try to eat similar amounts of bread, potatoes and cereal each day, as this will help control your blood sugar level
- Try to cut down on fried and fatty foods. Choose reduced-fat spreads and cheeses and lean meat. Try skimmed or semi-skimmed milk
- Grill, steam, microwave or bake food instead of frying and roasting
- Check food labels; low fat foods are often loaded with sugar
- Eat more fruit and vegetables (a total of 5 portions per day)
- Use less salt - try herbs and spices to add flavour
- Drink 6-8 glasses of water a day

Diabetic sweets, chocolate and biscuits offer no special benefits.

Drinking alcohol

Alcohol isn't out of bounds but it is worth remembering the following tips:

- Alcohol can trigger "hypos" which is when the blood sugar gets low - especially on an empty stomach
- Take care with low alcohol drinks as these are high in sugar
- After a few drinks, check your blood sugar before you go to bed and have a snack if needed.
- Drink alcohol in moderation - a maximum of 21 units per week for men and 14 for women
- One unit of alcohol = 1/2 pint ordinary beer, lager or cider or 1 measure of spirits or 1 glass of wine or 1 small glass of sherry or port.

