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Preventing and Managing Diabetes in British Columbia Backgrounder October 6, 2004

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is the name given to conditions in which the amount of glucose (a form of sugar) in an individual's blood is raised above normal levels.

What are Type I and Type II diabetes?

Type I diabetes (previously referred to as juvenile-onset diabetes) occurs when the pancreas does not make the insulin necessary for metabolizing the sugar in the blood. This type of diabetes usually shows itself when a person is a child, adolescent or young adult. It requires daily injections of insulin to maintain a safe blood sugar level. It accounts for about 10 - 15 per cent of the cases of diabetes in B.C.

Type II diabetes occurs when, for a variety of reasons, the body's insulin does not effectively process the glucose in the blood. It most often occurs after a person reaches the age of 30, and becomes increasingly common with increasing age. It most often occurs in those who are overweight or obese. Sometimes it can be managed with exercise and diet; sometimes it requires insulin or other medications. It accounts for about 85 per cent of the cases of diabetes.

How many people in B.C. have diabetes?

About 5.1 per cent of the population now has been diagnosed with diabetes, with this number expected to rise to 7.1 per cent by 2010.

What are the most common complications of diabetes?

Diabetes will often reduce an individual's life expectancy -on average, people with diabetes have about twice the mortality rate of their fellow citizens of the same age. Diabetes is a leading contributor to death from cardiovascular disease, to kidney failure, to amputations and to blindness. For example, Canadians with diabetes suffer, and die, from cardiovascular illnesses two to four times more often than their fellow citizens. They are also over 17 times more likely to suffer lower limb amputation than people their age who do not have diabetes.

What are the costs of diabetes in B.C.?

The cost to the public health care system of providing health care to people with diabetes is estimated at more than \$750 million annually. A significant portion of that cost relates to the disease itself, as the cost of health care for British Columbians with diabetes is about 1.7 times greater than that for their fellow citizens. As well, many individuals who have diabetes find they have to pay for a portion of the costs of necessary medication and equipment.



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