

# Doctors' Voice

July-August 2015

## Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic condition in which the levels of glucose (sugar) in the blood are too high. Blood glucose levels are normally regulated by the hormone insulin, which is made by the pancreas. Diabetes occurs when there is a problem with this hormone and how it works in the body.

Around 5.1 per cent of Australians aged 18 years or older have diabetes. The risk of diabetes increases with age, from 2.8% in people aged 35 to 44, to 15% in those aged 65 to 74. Aboriginal people have one of the highest rates of type 2 diabetes in the world.

**Types of diabetes** the main types of diabetes are type 1 and type 2. Other varieties include gestational diabetes, diabetes insipidus and pre-diabetes.

**Type 1 diabetes** occurs in approximately one in ten Australians with diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is much more common in Australia than in many other countries. Type 1 diabetes is:

- caused by an autoimmune destruction of insulin-making cells in the pancreas, which means insulin is no longer made
- one of the most common chronic childhood illnesses in developed nations
- most commonly develops in people under 30, but can occur at any age
- sometimes called juvenile diabetes or insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus, although these terms are no longer in common use.

There is no cure, but type 1 diabetes can be successfully managed with insulin injections, nutrition and exercise. If a person with type 1 diabetes skips a meal, exercises heavily or takes too much insulin, their blood sugar levels will fall. This can lead to hypoglycaemia. The symptoms include tremor, sweating, dizziness, hunger, headache and change in mood. This can be remedied with a quick boost of sugar (such as jellybeans or glucose tablets), then something more substantial such as fruit. A person with type 1 diabetes should have lollies on hand at all times, just in case.

**Type 2 diabetes** is sometimes described as a 'lifestyle disease' because it is more common in people who don't do enough physical activity, and who are overweight or obese. It is strongly associated with high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol levels, and an 'apple' body shape, where excess weight is carried around the waist.

Type 2 diabetes, the most common form of diabetes, affects 85 to 90% of all people with diabetes. While it usually affects mature adults (over 40), younger people are also now being diagnosed in greater numbers as rates of overweight and obesity increase.

Lifestyle  
risk factors  
for type 2  
diabetes



For the most common type of diabetes, type 2 diabetes, there are a number of risk factors over which you can have some control. These include:

- being overweight or obese, especially around the waist
- low levels of physical activity, including more than two hours of television watching per day
- unhealthy eating habits, such as regularly choosing high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt or low-fibre foods
- cigarette smoking.

People at risk need to have a laboratory blood glucose test (not using a portable blood glucose meter) performed by their doctor to check if they have diabetes. It is important not to wait for symptoms to develop, as these may not appear until the blood glucose is quite high.

**Pre-diabetes** is a condition in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal, although not high enough to cause diabetes. Pre-diabetes has no symptoms, but has a range of risk factors including obesity, smoking, heart disease, polycystic ovarian syndrome and high blood pressure. Without treatment, about one in three people with pre-diabetes will develop type 2 diabetes.

Speak with your Doctor or Practice Nurse to find out more.

Source:  
Better Health Channel [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)  
Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute

# Doctors' Voice



## Organ and Tissue Donation

Organ and tissue donation is a life-saving and life-transforming medical process. It's important that everyone discovers the facts about organ and tissue donation, decides whether to become a donor and discusses their decision with their family.

**Organ and tissue donation is important:** One organ and tissue donor can save the lives of up to 10 people and significantly improve the lives of many more. At any one time, there are almost 1,700 Australians waiting for a transplant on the official waiting list. Many people die each year waiting for the gift of a transplant. Some spend weeks or months in hospital, while others make several trips to hospital every week for dialysis or other treatment. Some people need to use an oxygen tank for 24 hours a day while they wait.

**Organ and tissue transplants are needed:** People who need an organ transplant are usually very ill or dying, because one or more of their own organs is failing. They range from babies and children through to older people. People needing a tissue transplant can be of any age. In some cases, tissue transplantation can save lives. More often, it greatly improves the recipient's life.

**Becoming an organ or tissue donor:** Almost everyone can donate organs and tissues; there is no age limit on the donation of some organs and tissues. The determining factors are where and how a person dies and the condition of their organs and tissue. While your age and medical history will be considered, you shouldn't assume you're too young, too old or not healthy enough to become a donor. You can decide to donate specific organs or tissues, with complete choice over which organs and/or tissues you wish to donate.

Donation can involve: Organs – including kidneys, heart, lungs, liver, intestines and pancreas: Tissues – including heart valves and tissues, bone and tendons, skin, and eye tissue.

**Telling your family about your donation decision:** The people close to you – your next of kin – need to know your donation decision. In the event of your death, they will be asked to confirm your donation wishes. In Australia, family consent is always sought before donation can proceed – even if you are listed on the Australian Organ Donor Register. Knowing the wishes of loved one is the most important factor that helps families to decide. Families that have discussed and know each other's donation decisions are much more likely to uphold those decisions.

## Where to get help

- DonateLife Victoria Tel. 1300 133 050
- The Australian Organ Donor Register Tel. 1800 777 203
- Speak with your doctor

## The Australian Organ Donor Register

The Australian Organ Donor Register is the official national register for people 16 years of age or older who want to donate. At the Australian Organ Donor Register, you can record your decision about becoming a donor of organs and tissues for transplantation after death. This ensures that authorised healthcare professionals anywhere in Australia can check your donation decision 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In the event of your death, information about your decision can be provided to your family.

Even if you have previously expressed an intention to donate organs and/or tissues (for example, by ticking a box on your driver's licence renewal), it's very important that you record your decision on the Australian Organ Donor Register.

You can register your donation decision by either:

- Going to the Australian Organ Donor Register and registering online
- Calling the Australian Organ Donor Register to ask for a registration form to be mailed to you
- Visiting a Medicare office and completing a registration form.

If you don't want to become an organ and tissue donor, you can also register your decision not to donate on the Australian Organ Donor Register.

Source:  
Better Health Channel [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)  
Australian Red Cross Blood Service