

Diabetes and the Seven Dimensions of wellness

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes has been defined as a chronic and metabolic disease that is characterised by high blood glucose (sugar) levels. There are two types of diabetes, Type 1 diabetes which used to be known as insulin-dependent diabetes where the pancreas produces little to no insulin. People with Type 1 diabetes need to take insulin for the rest of their lives. Whereas Type 2 diabetes, the most common type of diabetes and usually found among adults, occurs when the body develops a resistance to insulin or makes insufficient insulin (Diabetes Australia, 2021; World Health Organisation, 2021)

Prevalence of diabetes

Globally there are about 422 million people who have diabetes. A majority of these people live in low and middle income countries. Every year 1.6 million people die from diabetic complications each year. The prevalence of diabetes has been increasing in recent decades (World Health Organisation, 2021).

The following statistics show the extent of diabetes within certain Pacific Island Nations as follows:

- In PNG, the prevalence of diabetes in adults is 15.4% with total cases being 713,500
 - In Fiji, the prevalence of diabetes in adults is 15.1% with total cases being 87,000
 - In Tonga, the prevalence of diabetes in adults is 13.1% with total cases being 7,600
- (International Diabetes Federation, 2021)

Diabetic Complications

Diabetic long term complications develop over time, especially if blood sugar level is not well controlled and is frequently high. Complications include: Cardiovascular disease (significant increase in risk), damage to kidneys, eyes, feet and nerves, infections on the skin, hearing impairment, Alzheimer's disease, and depression (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

Preventing and Managing Diabetes from a Wellness Perspective

What can you do to prevent and manage diabetes from a wellness perspective? The following section will explain wellness strategies under the seven dimensions of wellness.

Physical:

These strategies can be used to prevent diabetes from developing or manage diabetes if you already have diabetes.

- **Diet:** Eat plenty of whole foods that contain high fibre and are low in fat. Aim for a diet that has plenty of vegetables such as taro, cassava, sago, and greens, whole grains such as brown rice, and fruits such as papaya, mangoes and watermelon. These foods help to keep blood sugars low and promote a healthy functioning body. Avoid refined foods such as white rice, biscuits, sweets, and packet noodles as these cause high sugar levels in the blood and are harmful. Limit tin fish.
- **Limit alcohol intake.**
- **Exercise:** Be more physically active. Exercise for about 30 minutes at least five days per week. Walking, or if you are feeling more energetic, jogging, or swimming, are

great ways of exercising. Exercise helps to reduce insulin resistance in Type 2 diabetes and aids in managing sugar levels in Type 1 diabetics.

- Lose weight: If you are overweight, then losing weight can reduce the risk of developing diabetes. By eating a healthy diet and exercising, you can lose weight.

(Based on the recommendations of Better Health Channel, 2020, and the Mayo Clinic, 2021)

Emotional:

Sometimes initiating lifestyle change can be difficult. Evaluate your feelings about diabetes. Think of someone you know that has diabetes and how this has affected their life. The medication they need to take every day. The frequency of testing sugar levels. The complications they have developed such as kidney, foot, and nerve problems, loss of eye sight, heart attacks, foot ulcers and other complications that can arise from developing diabetes. Use this reflection to motivate you to change your lifestyle so you reduce the risk of developing diabetes.

Social:

Eat healthy foods and exercise with family and friends. Eating well and exercising with others can be a strong motivator to keep up the lifestyle changes, especially as others also choose to eat healthy foods and exercise regularly as per recommendations above. Goals can be set among family or friends to lose a certain amount of weight or eat certain foods at particular meals. You can also set exercise goals and reward yourself for achieving the goal. Grow the wonderful greens in your garden that grow so well in the Pacific that when eaten will do wonders to provide you with a good source of nutrition and form part of a diabetes prevention diet, as outlined above.

Vocational:

Choose to move around during work. Sitting too long without moving will add to the risk of developing diabetes. If you have a job that requires a lot of sitting, make sure you stand up and move around every hour or two. This will not only prevent diabetes but also help to prevent other issues such as musculoskeletal problems such as back pain and arthritis.

Spiritual:

Think about your life journey and your relationship with God. See the diabetes prevention and management strategies as a part of your duty as a Christian. Remember the following Bible verse: "So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Therefore, make a commitment to yourself that you will be careful with what you eat, drink, and other activities so you will glorify God through your healthy choices. Ask God to help you to have the willpower and understanding to make good choices on what you eat, drink, and do.

Intellectual:

Think about the positive benefits of the diabetes prevention and management strategies and prevention of developing a debilitating condition that can be difficult to manage and easily progresses to long term complications if not properly managed.

Environmental:

Choose to exercise outside in the sunshine and fresh air. This can do wonders to your mood and make you feel better as you allow your skin to soak in the sun. Go outside for exercise early in the morning or late in the afternoon to avoid the hotter parts of the day. Walk among trees, flowers, and plants to help you feel happy and peaceful. Feeling good while exercising will help you to continue with your exercise program.

God bless you as you plan to make changes to your lifestyle to include these seven dimensions of wellness to prevent or manage diabetes.