NHS
University Hospitals
Coventry and Warwickshire
NHS Trust

Paediatric Diabetes

Paediatric Diabetes - Complications of diabetes

What are the complications of diabetes?

The complications that can occur are caused by regularly raised blood glucose levels damaging the nerves and the body's blood vessels. You may think that this happens to older people and will not affect you, but complications can affect younger people too. Complications are more likely the longer you have diabetes, and also if you have blood glucose levels and an HbA1c that is too high.

What can you do to help delay complications?

- Work out a plan with your diabetes team to reduce your HbA1c result – even a drop of 10mmol/l will reduce the risks. Your overall aim should be to achieve an HbA1c of 48mmol/l – 59mmol/l.
- Make sure you have your Annual Review. This will look for early signs of complications. If picked up early, problems can often be treated before they become a serious concern. Please see the information leaflet regarding Annual Review for more information. This is a good time to set yourself goals and targets to improve your diabetes care.
- Look after your feet. – Check out the information leaflet on Foot Care that tells you about this in more detail.
- Do not smoke – this makes the hardening and furring of the blood vessels in your body much worse - if you need help to stop, talk to your diabetes team or your GP or telephone the National NHS Smokefree Helpline on 0300 123 1044 or Stop4life on 0800 612 4580.
- Get plenty of exercise – find something you enjoy and get active.

- Eat healthily and avoid putting on too much weight - plenty of fruit and vegetables and not too much fat – talk to your dietitian if you have concerns.
- The better you control your blood glucose levels, the lower the risk of getting complications. Remember there is a lot you can do to help delay the onset of complications. Keep in contact with your diabetes team for advice and support on 024 7696 7230.

What are the complications of diabetes?

Diabetic foot problems

Foot damage by ulceration happens because regularly high blood glucose levels cause nerve and blood vessel damage. This means an injury to the foot may not be felt before it becomes a serious infection. Due to the poor blood vessel supply it may not heal properly and could develop an ulcer.

Eye disease

Diabetic retinopathy is caused by damage to the small blood vessels at the back to the eye. Early detection and treatment can help prevent sight problems and blindness, but a number of people with diabetes will still go blind each year.

Kidney disease

This is caused by damage to the small blood vessels in the kidney from regularly high blood glucose levels and also from high blood pressure, which can occur as you get older.

Heart disease

People with diabetes are more at risk of heart disease because raised blood glucose increases the risk of furring and hardening of the blood vessels which occurs as we get older.

Stroke

People with diabetes are more likely to have a stroke because of the effect raised blood glucose levels have on the blood vessels that go to the brain.

Impotence

This is when a male is unable to get an erect penis. This can result from having diabetes for many years. There is help available, so please talk to your diabetes team should you need any advice.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, we will do our best to meet your needs. Please contact the Department on 024 7696 7230.

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