

# The Complications of Diabetes

Diabetes is caused by a lack of insulin in the body, or the body's inability to use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone that controls blood sugar levels.

If diabetes is poorly controlled (your blood sugar levels are high), it can cause long-term problems with your:

- Heart
- Circulation
- Kidneys
- Feet
- Eyes
- Sexual Function

Treatments for diabetes aim to keep blood sugar levels within normal limits and therefore prevent long-term complications.

## Other factors increasing the risk of complications:

If you smoke

If you have high blood pressure

If you have raised blood fat / cholesterol levels

If you do not have a balanced diet

If you are overweight

If you are not physically active or take no exercise

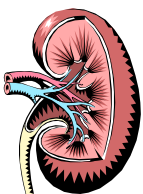


## Heart and Circulation problems (Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke)

Heart disease is more common in people with diabetes. Damage to the heart and blood circulation, is caused by a build up of cholesterol on the linings of the blood vessels. This restricts the flow of blood around the body which can result in heart attack. Cardiovascular disease is a major cause of ill health and death in the UK population in general. However, people with diabetes have four times the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke and circulation problems. You can help prevent cardiovascular disease by:

- not smoking,
- losing weight( if overweight)
- decreasing the amount of fat in your diet
- exercising regularly and
- keeping your blood pressure under control

**Don't give up giving up.**



## Kidney Problems (Diabetic Nephropathy)

Diabetes can cause damage to kidneys. Kidney damage caused by damage to the blood vessel that supply the kidney. Your blood pressure and your kidney function must be checked regularly. This will take place at your annual review.



## Foot Problems (Diabetic Neuropathy or Ischaemic Foot)



Diabetes can lead to:

- Nerve damage in the feet and legs resulting in a loss of sensation, pins, and needles or possible numbness and burning sensations. This is called neuropathy.
- A reduced blood supply to the feet and legs resulting in cold, painful feet. This means injuries to the feet may go unnoticed, be slow to heal and can quickly become infected.

Every 30 seconds a leg is lost to diabetes somewhere in the world. Up to 70 % of all leg amputations happen to people with diabetes. You can help prevent foot problems by:

- Looking after your feet as advised by your health professional
- Seeing advice urgently when you have wounds or sores

It is important that your feet are examined as part of your annual review each year so that any problems can be treated early.



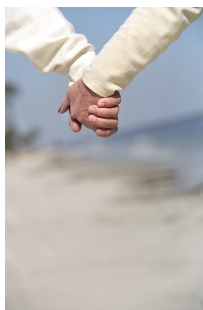
## Eye Problems (Diabetic Retinopathy)

Diabetes can lead to visual problems (in some case blindness) due to changes in the retina at the back of the eye, called diabetic retinopathy. If your diabetes is well controlled, then you are less likely to have problems, or they may be less serious.

Most loss of vision due to diabetes can be prevented, but it is vital that it is diagnosed early. This can only be detected by a detailed examination of the eyes. Therefore make sure that you have a Retinal Screening test (a photograph of the retina) once every year. This is usually done at a special centre, not at an optician.



## Sexual Function



Diabetes is a common, but not the only cause of impotence (erection problems) in men. Diabetes can cause nerve damage and once it has occurred it is unlikely to be reversed.

Treatments are available for men with erection problems. If you have a problem, tell your health professional, who will be used to dealing with this. They may prescribe you medication or refer you to a specialist.

**Diabetes should not prevent you from doing any activity people without diabetes can do. Take an active role in controlling and managing your diabetes and you can have a long and fulfilling life.**