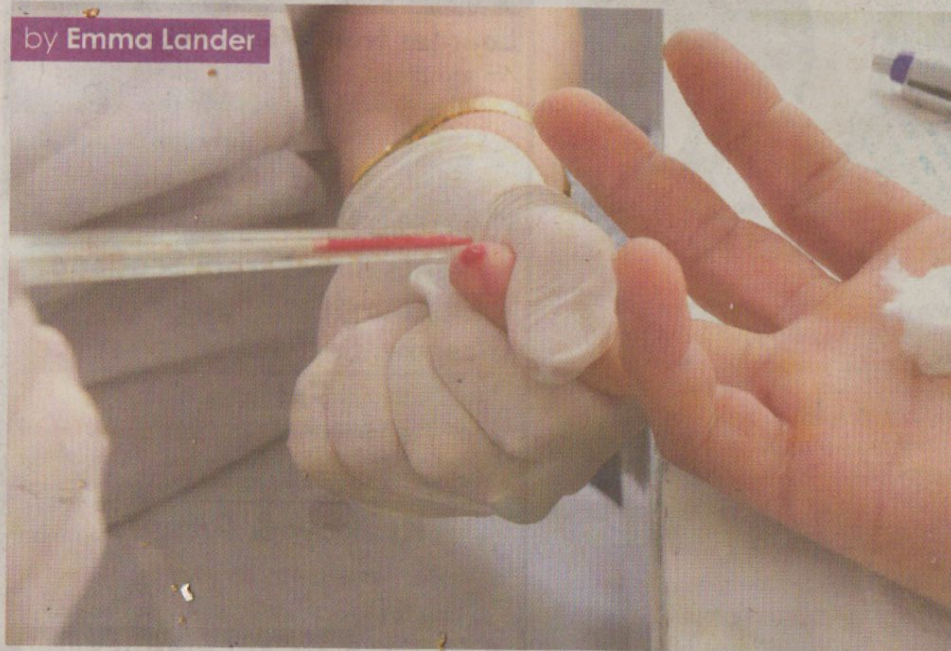


Getting to grips with diabetes

by Emma Lander



The number of people diagnosed with diabetes in the UK has increased to more than 3.2 million, according to figures released earlier this year by Diabetes UK.

The new figures, extracted from official NHS data, show that there were 3,208,014 adults with the condition in 2013, an increase of more than 163,000 compared to 2012.

This is the biggest increase in a single year since 2008 and it means six per cent of UK adults are now diagnosed with diabetes (this does not include the hundreds of thousands of people with undiagnosed Type 2 diabetes).

Type 1 diabetes, believed to be an autoimmune disease with possible genetic factors, can occur at any age but most often starts in late childhood.

With this type, the body destroys its own insulin-producing cells, so people have to inject insulin daily in order to regulate their blood sugar levels.

Symptoms include feeling extremely thirsty, frequent need to urinate, excessive tiredness, frequent skin infections and unexplained weight loss.

Type 2 diabetes is far more common, making up 90 per cent of all cases.

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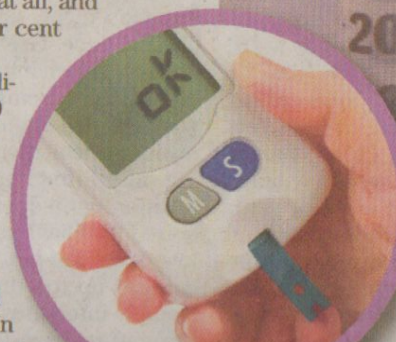
Despite its prevalence (one in 20 of the population is being treated for diabetes and one in 10 for obesity), experts believe there's still a lack of awareness about symptoms, and an urgent need for early diagnosis, which can prevent heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure and blindness.

Experts explain that Type 2 diabetes can go undetected for up to 10 years, meaning 50 per cent of people already have serious complications by the time they're diagnosed.

Diabetes occurs when the pancreas loses some, or all, of its power to function and stops producing as much insulin (a hormone which converts glucose into energy), thereby creating a build-up of glucose in the blood. There are also cases of diabetes when insulin is still produced, but fails to break down the glucose in the body – a situation known as insulin resistance.

Diabetes UK's clinical advisor, Cathy Moulton, explains that while the two kinds of diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2, differ in cause and speed of onset, they have similar symptoms. Type 1 diabetes develops if the body can't produce any insulin at all, and accounts for about 10 per cent of all diabetes cases.

It is most commonly diagnosed in the under-40 age bracket, and the cause isn't fully understood. Type 2 is different and develops when the body still makes some insulin, but not enough, or when the insulin that's produced doesn't work properly. In



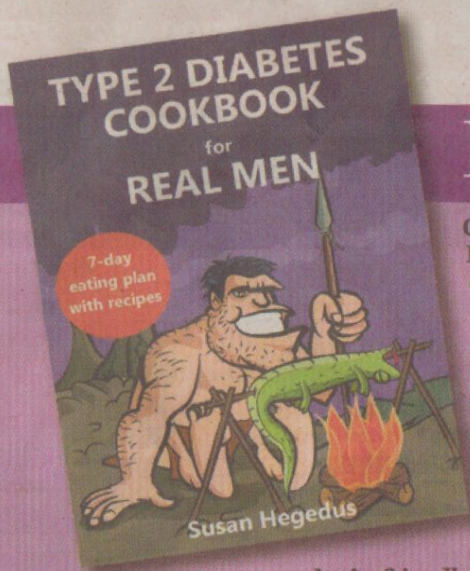
polycystic ovary syndrome or have had gestational diabetes.

Symptoms are similar in both types of diabetes, and include increased urination (espe-

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The size of the increase may be partly explained by a change in methodology (the figure now includes people with rarer forms of diabetes as well as with Type 1 and Type 2), while some new cases may reflect improvements in diagnosis.



It's Type 2 which is linked to lifestyle, with being overweight or obese the biggest risk factor. It mostly affects over 40s and the elderly, though in people of black or South Asian origin, known to be at higher risk, it can occur in people as young as 25.

Healthy diet and lifestyle are crucial for controlling it, but medication may also be required. It's a myth that Type 2 is a 'less

doesn't work properly. In most cases, the condition is linked to being overweight.

The fact that the number of people registered as obese in the UK has risen by more than 265,000, to over 5.5 million in the past year, may go a long way to explaining the increase in diabetes.

Other risk factors include having a large waist (37 inches or more for men, 31.5 inches or more for women), being aged over 40 (or over 25 in black and South Asian people), having a close relative with diabetes, women who have suffered from

excessive urination (especially during the night), excessive thirst, lethargy and blurred vision because glucose builds up in the lens of the eye.

Type 2 diabetics may then be put on tablets to help the body release more insulin, lower the amount of sugar the liver makes, help insulin work better in muscle and fat and, in some cases, slow the breakdown of food into sugar. They may also receive non-insulin injections, which encourage the production of insulin itself and help it get to the right place in the body.

Whatever the type of diabetes, the condition significantly reduces life expectancy – people with Type 1 diabetes have a reduced life expectancy of up to 20 years, and the lives of those with Type 2 could be cut short by up to a decade.

Some of this is due to the increased risk of cardiovascular disease – around half the people with diabetes die of cardiovascular problems, including strokes and heart attacks.

And even if diabetes doesn't actually kill, it can make life very unpleasant.

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in the UK's working age population, and results in 100 amputations a week because of damage to nerve endings.

The good news is that these can be avoided, providing people manage their condition well and have regular check-ups to spot the early warning signs of problems.

There seems to be a lot of shame surrounding the condition. Headlines in national newspaper don't help like 'Diabetes Timebomb' leading to many people burying their head in the sand about the condition or hiding it from friends and relatives.

The fact is, if you ignore diabetes, you could be shortening your life.

Food for Real Men

Catholic author and regular *Universe* columnist, Susan Hegedus knows all too well about dealing with the condition.

Her husband Anthony was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in 2010 and, after the initial shock, they both realised that a complete diet overhaul was required.

"This medical label had suddenly attached itself to him. I knew he would have to change his diet," Susan told *The Universe*.

"But where were we supposed to begin? This man loved bacon sandwiches and pot noodles! How was he going to break the habits of a lifetime?"

"I can't pretend our first few weeks were easy. We were new to the world of diabetes, and he kicked against the idea of special meals. So I began to prepare diabetic-friendly meals for the whole family rather than cooking separately."

Susan decided to write her findings down and has just published her book *Type 2 Diabetes for Real Men*.

"My aim was to produce healthy meals which were cooked from scratch but that didn't compromise on taste. I knew whole foods were much better than processed foods and that was my starting point. I certainly didn't want to be diving for the glycemic index manual every time I cooked something. I realised diabetic eating was about moderation – not depriving yourself."

Susan openly states that her husband was not keen on 'rabbit food' so she tailored meals so they did not include salads or too many fancy vegetables.

"Only 'food for real men' was on the menu," she said.

"He has been happy with my approach and, as they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating: my husband's glycaemic haemoglobin level has dropped substantially. We have never looked back!"

