

## Diabetes myths

Here are the facts that correct some of the common diabetes myths.

### *'People with diabetes cannot have sweet food or drinks'* – not true

Diabetes is a condition where blood glucose levels are too high, many people think they need to avoid sugar and foods containing sugar. Small amounts of added sugar, lollies and desserts can be eaten in small amounts as part of a healthy meal plan combined with a healthy lifestyle. This is the dietary recommendation for all Australians, not only those with diabetes.

### *'Diabetes is not serious'* – not true

All types of diabetes are serious and can lead to diabetes-related complications if not well managed. Diabetes can affect quality of life and can reduce life expectancy.

### *'All types of diabetes are the same'* – not true

The main types of diabetes are type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes. There are also other types of diabetes that are less common.

Each type of diabetes is different. Once someone has diabetes, they will need to manage it every day. Gestational diabetes needs managing while pregnant but usually goes away once the baby is born. All types of diabetes are complex and serious.

### *'Diabetes can be prevented in all cases'* – not true

Not all types of diabetes can be prevented. Type 1 is an autoimmune condition; there is no cure and no prevention. Nobody knows what causes type 1 diabetes.

There is no single cause of type 2 diabetes, but there are well-established risk factors. The risk of developing diabetes is affected by things that cannot be changed, such as family history, age, and ethnic background. However, the risk of developing type 2 diabetes can be reduced by changing lifestyle factors such as exercise and diet.

### *'You have to be overweight or obese to develop diabetes'* – not true

Being overweight or obese is one risk factor for type 2 diabetes, but it is not a direct cause. Some people who are overweight will not develop type 2 diabetes. In contrast, some people who are a healthy weight will develop type 2 diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition and is not related to weight.

### *'You only get type 1 diabetes when you're young'* – not true

Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age. It often occurs in children and young adults, but older people can also develop type 1 diabetes.

### *'You only get type 2 diabetes when you're old'* – not true

Type 2 diabetes usually develops in adults over the age of 45 years, but it is becoming more common in younger age groups, including children, adolescents, and young adults.

Find this resource at [ndss.com.au](http://ndss.com.au)

### ***‘People with diabetes should eat a diabetic diet’ – not true***

There is no such thing as a ‘diabetic diet’. People with diabetes do not need a special diet, or things like artificially sweetened, low-joule, diet or sugar-free jams, chocolates or treats. They should aim to eat a healthy diet, the same as everybody else.

### ***‘Only people with type 1 diabetes need insulin’ – not true***

It is true that people with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin every day of their lives. But some people with type 2 diabetes also need to take insulin every day.

Medication to support a person with type 2 diabetes changes over time. People may be prescribed more of one type of medication or have different types of medications added in. Half of the people with type 2 diabetes will need insulin six to ten years after being diagnosed.

Type 2 diabetes does not become type 1 diabetes when a person starts taking insulin.

### ***‘People who have diabetes complications have not looked after themselves properly’ – not true***

People should not be blamed if they do have diabetes-related complications. While having regular blood glucose levels above the target level increases the risk of developing diabetes-related complications, they can develop in people with diabetes who manage their diabetes well because they have an increased genetic risk. Having regular health checks can help identify early warning signs and potentially reduce the damage diabetes can cause.