

Information

Healthy lifestyle, fasting and diabetes

September 2003

Page 1 of 2

Fasting for religious reasons

People with diabetes may not be expected to fast, but may wish to do so because of their beliefs. It is important to remember certain points.

- If your diabetes is treated by diet only, then fasting should not cause any problems.
- If you take sulphonylurea tablets (which make your blood glucose lower), or insulin, you must be aware of the danger of hypos (low blood glucose levels). Talk to your doctor or nurse about when to take your medicine, and how much to take.
- If you take metformin tablets, these should normally be taken at the end of the fast, eg in the evening. Talk about this with your doctor or nurse.
- At the end of the fast, you may want to eat a lot of starchy food such as rice, bread and potato, and have more sugary drinks. Remember this will make your blood glucose rise so you may need to change your medicine. Talk about this with your doctor or nurse before you start the fast.

Physical activity

There are three main reasons to keep physically active,

- To help keep your weight down by using (burning) up fat.
- Blood glucose levels are better controlled which reduces the risk of complications which are related to poor blood glucose control. Staying active also helps to keep your bones healthy.
- Activity also helps you to feel more lively so helping to prevent depression.

How much activity should you do?

The advice on physical activity is that you should do 30 minutes of moderate activity a day. This should make you feel slightly breathless and warm. Walking is a good way to do this, but it is important to remember even doing housework or gardening can be included in the 30 minutes. Another way of increasing your activity is to get off the bus a stop or two earlier and walk to the shop.

If you are not physically able to do these activities, then ask your doctor or nurse about armchair exercises, which will help you to build up your strength.

If you want to try a more energetic activity, ask advice from your doctor or nurse before starting this.

It is very important you check with your doctor or nurse if you,

The charity for people with diabetes

Diabetes UK is the operating name of the **British Diabetic Association**
Company limited by guarantee Registered office: 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA
Registered in England no. 339181 Registered charity no. 215199

- are taking medicine for diabetes or heart disease
- have complications of diabetes such as eye problems
- need advice about the right activity for you
- cannot move around very well such as having stiff joints
- intend to do extra activity regularly as your medicine may need to be changed.

Diet and diabetes

The information on this sheet is to help you understand about the food you eat and how it might have an effect on your blood glucose levels. Your diet can still include a lot of the foods you have always enjoyed, but there are certain guidelines you must follow to have good blood glucose control.

Six steps to healthy eating

There is no need to buy special 'diabetic' food as this is expensive and is often high in fat.

- Eat regular meals based on starchy food such as bread, pasta, chapatis, potatoes, rice, yams and cereals. This will help you control your blood glucose levels. Choose high fibre varieties of these foods like wholemeal bread, wholewheat cereals, lentils and mung beans.
- Try to cut down on the fat you eat, especially animal fats (saturated), as this type of fat is linked to heart disease. Eating less fat and fatty food, such as samosas, pies and sweet pastries, will also help you lose weight. Choose low fat dairy foods like skimmed milk and low fat yoghurt. Grill, steam or oven bake food instead of frying it. Avoid using ghee, try olive or rapeseed oil instead.
- Eat more fruit and vegetables – try to have at least five portions a day as this will give you vitamins and fibre as well as helping to balance your diet.
- Cut down on sugar and sugary foods. This does not mean you need to eat a sugar-free diet. Use diet, low sugar or sugar free squashes and fizzy drinks. Pure fruit juices contain vitamins, but also raise the blood glucose level, so avoid drinking them in large amounts. Other sugary drinks make your blood glucose level go up quickly.
- Use less salt, because lots of salt in the diet can raise your blood pressure. Food can be flavoured with herbs and spices instead.
- If you drink alcohol, you should keep to the guidelines of two units a day for a woman and three units for a man. A unit is equal to a glass of wine, half a pint of beer or lager or a single measure of spirits. Always eat some starchy food before drinking alcohol to help prevent hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels).

Keeping your blood glucose levels under good control, can greatly reduce the risk of complications related to diabetes. It is important that you attend your diabetes clinic regularly to be monitored and any sign of complications can be dealt with as soon as possible.

We have a range of information sheets produced in five main Asian languages and Cantonese available from the Diabetes UK Careline including *Hypoglycaemia, Diabetic complications and How Diabetes UK can help you*. To order information sheets or would like further information on any aspect of diabetes please telephone

Telephone 020 7424 1030 (translation service is available)

Open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

From January 2004 there will be a new Diabetes UK Careline number available

Telephone 0845 120 2960 (local call rate)