

Healthy eating for the South Asian community



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Introduction

This booklet offers general guidance about healthy eating choices for people within the South Asian community with Type 2 diabetes. Balancing your diet when you have Type 2 diabetes can be challenging but it is important. Making sensible food choices and adapting your eating habits will help you manage your diabetes and help protect your long-term health. Whether you have the condition, or know or care for somebody with Type 2 diabetes, we hope you will find this information helpful.

Taking steps to balance your diet, as outlined in this booklet, will help you control your blood glucose levels, blood fats (including cholesterol) and blood pressure. This booklet is also a good starting point if you need to think about managing your weight.

You're likely to have lots of questions about your diet and we've tried to answer the most common ones in this leaflet. Speak to your dietitian if you have any further concerns.

Your diet and diabetes

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a common life-long condition where the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high as it cannot be used properly. This is because the pancreas does not produce any or not enough insulin, or the insulin that is produced doesn't work properly (known as insulin resistance). Insulin helps glucose enter the body's cells, where it is used for energy.

Glucose comes from digesting carbohydrate from various kinds of food and drink and is also produced by the liver.

There are two main types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2.

Type 1 diabetes develops when the insulin-producing cells have been destroyed and the body is unable to produce any insulin. Usually it appears before the age of 40, and especially in childhood. It is treated with insulin, either by injection or pump, a healthy diet and regular physical activity.

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body doesn't produce enough insulin or the insulin that is produced doesn't work properly. Usually it appears in people aged over 40, though in South Asian and Black people it can appear from the age of 25. It is becoming more common in children and young people of all ethnicities. Type 2 diabetes is treated with a healthy diet and regular physical activity, but medication including insulin is often required.

It's important to have good glucose control when managing diabetes. Because of the link between eating carbohydrate and blood glucose levels, we have answered some common questions about carbohydrate on the following pages.

What is carbohydrate?

The two main types of carbohydrate are as follows:

1. Starchy carbohydrates include foods like bread, pasta, chapatis, potatoes, yam, noodles, rice and cereals.

2. Sugars which can be categorised as:

- *natural sugar*, eg fruit sugar known as fructose and milk sugar known as lactose
- *added sugar*, includes table sugar (eg caster, granulated), glucose and honey.

Sugars can often be identified on food labels as those ingredients ending in -ose.

Why is carbohydrate important?

All carbohydrate is converted into glucose and will have an impact on blood glucose levels. Therefore, some people with diabetes wonder if it would be better not to have any carbohydrate in their diet to keep their glucose levels under control. This is not recommended as:

- glucose from carbohydrate is essential to the body, especially the brain
- high fibre carbohydrates, such as wholegrains and fruit, also play an important role in the health of the gut
- some carbohydrates may help you to feel fuller for longer.

How much do I need?

The actual amount of carbohydrate that the body needs varies depending on your age, weight and activity levels, but it should make up about half of what you eat and drink. For good health most of this should be from starchy carbohydrate, fruits and some dairy foods, with no more than one fifth of your total carbohydrate to come from added sugar.



Your questions answered

Q

Can I still have rice in my diet?

A

Yes, starchy carbohydrate such as rice should be included in all your meals. Basmati and easy-cook rice are better choices if you have diabetes as they are absorbed more slowly so have less of an effect on your blood glucose levels. Try not to have too big a portion – see pages 12–13 for more details.

Q

Can I still have some sugar in my diet?

A

Yes. Eating sugar doesn't cause diabetes and people with diabetes do not need to have a sugar-free diet. It's okay to have foods like mithai and cakes occasionally alongside a healthy diet. Remember sugary foods provide empty calories.

Q

Is it true that I shouldn't eat bananas, mangoes or grapes?

A

No. All fruit is good for you. Eating more fruit can reduce the risk of heart disease, some cancers and some gut problems. Eat a variety of different fruit and vegetables for maximum benefit.

Q

Are there any herbal remedies that can control my diabetes?

A

Generally herbal remedies are not recommended, as there is no evidence to suggest that they are safe. They cannot cure diabetes and shouldn't be used to replace medication given to you by your doctor.

Q

What traditional savoury snacks are considered healthy?

A

Many traditional snacks, such as chevda, kachori, gathia and papad tend to be fried, and high in calories and salt. Try healthier alternatives such as roasted chana, baked papad and steamed dhokra. Avoid adding extra oil on top.

Q

English is not my first language. Where can I find further information in my language?

A

Information in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu about all aspects of diabetes can be found on our website. See www.diabetes.org.uk/OnlineShop/Information-in-different-languages. You can also attend diabetes education programmes or talks in your language – ask your healthcare team about what’s available in your area.

Q

I’d like to use a sweetener instead of sugar in my tea but I’ve heard that they aren’t safe. Is this true?

A

All sweeteners have to undergo rigorous safety tests before they can be sold in the UK. The government sets safe limits and surveys groups of individuals to see whether they are exceeding these limits. At the moment there is no evidence to suggest that the general public is exceeding these safe limits.



Ten steps to eating well

1 Eat three meals a day. Avoid skipping meals and space out your breakfast, lunch and evening meal over the day. This will not only help control your appetite but will also help control your blood glucose levels.

2 At each meal include starchy carbohydrate foods such as rice, chapatis, bread, pasta and breakfast cereals. The amount of carbohydrate you eat is important to control your blood glucose levels. Especially try to include those that are more slowly absorbed (have a lower glycaemic index) as these won't affect your blood glucose levels as much. Better choices include: basmati or easy cook rice, grainy breads such as granary, pumpernickel and rye, chapatis made with millet or chickpea flour, pasta, porridge oats, All-Bran and natural muesli. The high fibre varieties of starchy foods will also help to maintain the health of your digestive system and prevent problems such as constipation.



3 Cut down on the fat you eat, particularly saturated fats, as a low fat diet benefits health. Choose unsaturated fats or oils, especially monounsaturated fat (eg olive oil and rapeseed oil) as these types of fats are better for your heart. As fat is the greatest source of calories, eating less fat will help you to lose weight if you need to. To cut down on the fat you eat, here are some tips:

- use less saturated fat by having less butter or ghee
- choose lean meat and fish as low fat alternatives to fatty meats such as kebab and doner meat
- choose lower fat dairy foods such as skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low fat or diet yogurts, reduced fat cheese, low fat paneer, lower fat spreads, and reduced fat coconut cream or milk.

- Skim off the excess top layer of oil before serving the dish.
- Limit fried foods such as bhathuras, samosas, pakoras, bhajis, katchori, ghathia or muttaya.
- Grill, steam or oven bake instead of frying or cooking with oil or other fats. If you need to cook with oil reduce the amount used.
- Use tomato-based sauces instead of creamy sauces and dressings.

4 Eat more fruit and vegetables. Aim for at least five portions a day to provide you with vitamins, minerals and fibre to help you to balance your overall diet. One portion is, for example, a banana or apple, a handful of grapes, a tablespoon of dried fruit, a small glass of fruit juice or fruit smoothie, three heaped tablespoons of vegetables or a cereal bowl of salad.

5 Aim for at least two portions of oily fish a week. Examples include mackerel, sardines, salmon and pilchards. Oily fish contains a type of polyunsaturated fat called omega 3 which helps protect against heart disease.

6 Limit sugar and sugary foods – such as laddoo, gulab jamun, halva and rassomalai. This does not mean you need to eat a sugar-free diet. Sugar can be used in foods and in baking in moderation as part of a healthy diet. You could reduce the sugar in your diet by using sugar-free, no added sugar or diet fizzy drinks/squashes, instead of sugary versions.

7 Include more beans and lentils such as kidney beans, butter beans, chickpeas, red lentils or mung beans. These have less of an effect on your blood glucose levels and may help to control your blood fats. Try adding them to curries, soups, or to a salad.



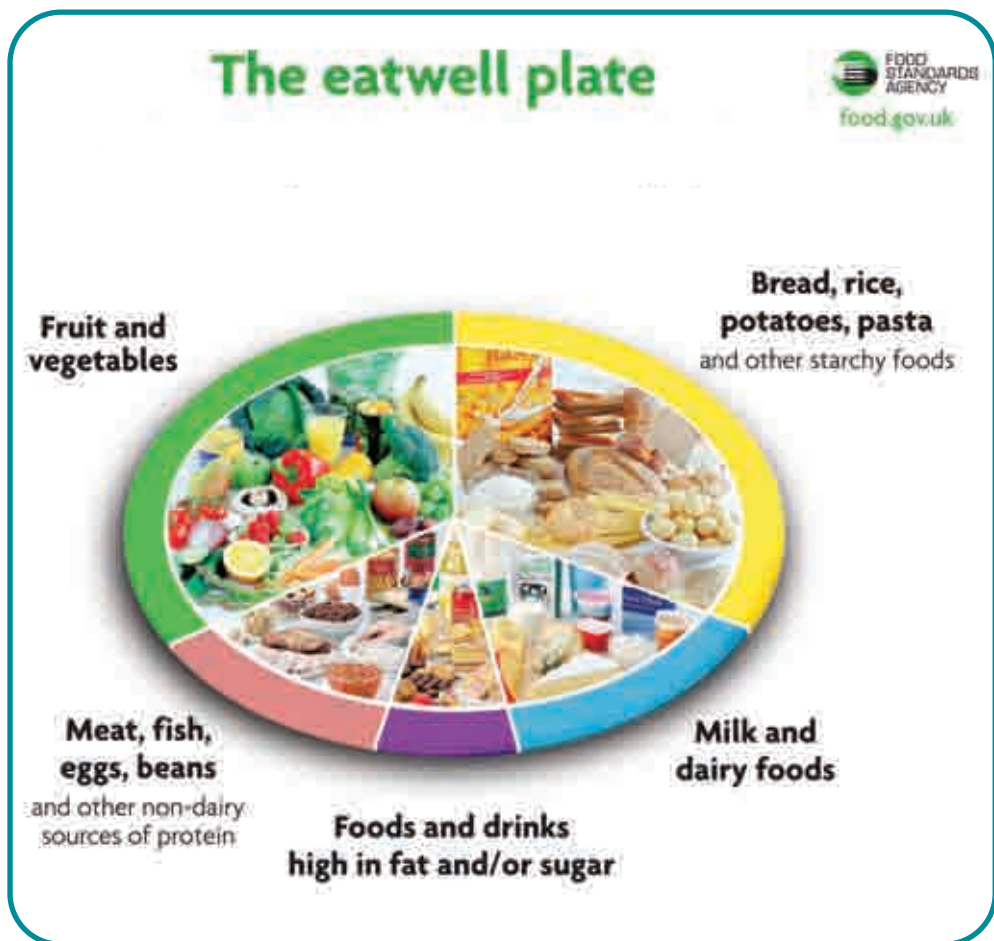
8 Reduce salt in your diet to 6g or less a day – more than this can raise your blood pressure, which can lead to stroke and heart disease. Limit the amount of processed foods you eat such as chevda, salty nuts and crisps and try flavouring foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.

9 Drink alcohol in moderation only – that's a maximum of 2 units of alcohol per day for a woman and 3 units per day for a man. For example, a single pub measure (25ml) of spirit is about 1 unit or half a pint of lager, ale, bitter or cider has 1 – 1 ½ units. Over the years the alcohol content of most drinks has gone up. A drink can now contain more units than you think – a small glass of wine (175ml) could contain as much as 2 units. Remember, alcohol contains empty calories so think about cutting back further if you are trying to lose weight. Never drink on an empty stomach, as alcohol can make hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels) more likely to occur when taking certain diabetes medication.

10 Don't use diabetic foods or drinks. They offer no benefit to people with diabetes. They will still affect your blood glucose levels, contain just as much fat and calories as the ordinary versions, can have a laxative effect and are expensive.

A healthy balance

Foods can be divided into five main groups. To enjoy a balanced diet we need to eat foods from these groups in the right proportions. Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



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Getting the balance right

A good way to see if you are achieving the right balance is to think about how many portions of these foods you normally eat and see how it compares to the table below. Remember, everyone's nutritional needs are different and you may need more or less portions than those suggested.

Food groups and what's in a portion

Bread, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes. One portion is equal to:

- 2–4 tbsp cereal
- 1 slice of bread
- half a small chapati
- 2–3 crispbreads or crackers
- 2–3 tbsp rice, pasta, cous-cous, noodles or mashed potato
- 2 new potatoes or half a baked potato

Fruit and vegetables. One portion is equal to:

- a banana or apple
- a slice of melon
- 2 plums
- a small glass of fruit juice or smoothie
- 3 dates
- a cereal bowl of salad
- 3 heaped tbsp of vegetables

Meat, fish and alternatives. One portion is equal to:

- 2–3 oz (60-85g) meat, poultry or vegetarian alternative like soya or quorn
- 4–5 oz (120-140g) fish
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp nuts
- 3 tbsp beans, lentils or dahl, chick peas, mung beans, pulses

Milk and dairy foods. One portion is equal to:

- $\frac{1}{3}$ pint milk
- small pot yogurt
- 2 tbsp cottage cheese
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz cheese (40-45g, matchbox size)

Fatty and sugary foods. One portion is equal to:

- 2 tsp spread, butter, oil,
- $\frac{1}{3}$ vegetable samosa
- 1 tbsp Bombay mix
- 1 mini chocolate bar
- 2 tsp sugar, jam or honey
- 1 scoop ice cream or 1 tbsp cream

Remember...

If you are trying to lose weight, the sizes of your portions may need to change. Ask your dietitian for more specific advice.

How many portions do you eat in a day?	How many portions should you eat in a day?
	7–14 Include starchy foods at all meals. Choose more slowly absorbed varieties whenever possible. (see page 5)
	5 or more Choose a wide variety of foods from this group, including fresh, frozen, dried and tinned.
	2–3 Choose the lower fat alternatives whenever possible and eat more beans
	3 Choose lower fat versions of milk and dairy foods.
	0–4 Cut down on sugary and fatty foods.

What's on your plate?

Watching what you eat when you have diabetes isn't about going on a diet. It's about making small, healthy changes to make your eating habits more balanced. The occasional one or two high fat, sugary or salty foods won't undo all your good work. Use the ideas on the following pages to plan your meals over the day.



Breakfast

It's a good idea to opt for something filling like porridge, All-Bran or Fruit and fibre to see you through the morning. Add semi-skimmed or skimmed milk, and try adding fruit to notch up a portion towards your five-a-day target early in the day. You can use any fruit and it can be fresh, frozen, stewed, canned or dried.

A small glass of unsweetened fruit juice can count towards one of your five a day, but no matter how much you drink, fruit juice can only count as one portion in any one day. Some people find it affects blood glucose levels quickly so it's not the best choice for quenching your thirst.

Bread, toast, bread muffins and crumpets are good alternatives to cereal. Wholegrain and granary versions are better for making you feel fuller for longer. Choose a low fat spread or one based on monounsaturated fat. Ordinary jams and marmalades or reduced sugar versions are okay too.

Main meals

Making time for lunch and dinner is good for us all especially for controlling your appetite as well as your diabetes. Lean meat, fish, eggs, or dahl with a large portion of salad or vegetables are all good choices. Try these with basmati rice, chapatis, granary bread, pitta bread or pasta. Avoid adding extra butter, ghee or oil on chapatis, in dahls and sabjis at the table. For a better balance follow your meal with a piece of fruit or a low fat yogurt.

Try to have a balanced main meal every day. Use your plate as a rough guide to help you to eat foods in the recommended proportions (see below)

Weight maintenance

rice, chapati, pasta, bread, potato or other starchy food

meat, fish, eggs, beans, cheese or vegetarian alternative – choose low fat varieties



fruit or vegetables

Trying to lose weight

rice, chapati, pasta, bread, potato or other starchy food

fruit or vegetables



meat, fish, eggs, beans, cheese or vegetarian alternative – choose low fat varieties

Think...

Being diagnosed with diabetes can be a great time to review your diet – why not take a chance and try new foods and recipes?

Managing your weight

If you are overweight and have Type 2 diabetes, losing weight can have a host of benefits for your health, and you probably don't need to lose as much as you think. Losing just 5–10 per cent of your weight (That's 5–10kg if you are 100kg or about $\frac{3}{4}$ stone – $1\frac{1}{2}$ stones if you are 15 stone) can:



lower your blood fats
lower your blood pressure and
lower your blood glucose levels.

You don't have to reach an 'ideal' weight either – be realistic and aim to lose weight slowly over time (0.5–1.0 kg (1–2 lbs) a week).

What's the best diet to follow?

Fad diets, which promise a quick fix or are over restrictive, offer no benefit in the long-term. Steer clear of diets that cut out food groups such as carbohydrate-free diets too. It's better to set realistic, achievable targets and enjoy a healthy balanced diet. Many people have tried a variety of diets and it is quite normal for it to take a number of attempts before the weight comes off and more importantly stays off.

Where do I start?

1. Keep a food diary – noting what, how much and when you eat is the first step to being food aware.
2. Eat three regular meals a day.
3. Eat plenty of fruit.
4. Reduce your portions.
5. Cut down on snacks or replace them with healthier options like fruit.

6. Plan your meals so that you are less inclined to rely on old favourites that may be high in fat.
7. Be more active.
8. Become weight aware. Check your weight weekly for an insight into how things are going.
9. Think about joining a support group – ask your healthcare team about ones in your area.
10. Fill half of your plate at your main meal with vegetables.

How can I find out more?

Getting help with finding the right treatment option for you and your weight is important. Your GP, practice nurse or dietitian can work through this with you. You may also find it helpful to refer to Diabetes UK's publication about weight management called 'Weight creeping up on you?'

What changes to my medication may I need to make?

Your diabetes medication should correspond with the food you eat and the activity you do. As you eat less, become more active and lose weight, you may need your diabetes medication dose reduced. Talk to your doctor or nurse for advice about how to adjust your medication.



Eating out, special occasions and fasting



Although a healthy diet is key to everyday living with diabetes and long-term health, balanced eating isn't about restricting or excluding food choices. Whether it's a wedding, party, religious festival such as Diwali, Eid or Baisakhi, food is likely to be on the agenda and having diabetes doesn't mean that you have to miss out.

We all have a tendency to eat meals that are high in sugar and fat when we eat out. If you do this quite frequently then you need to be more careful and make healthier food choices.

If you are invited to someone's house for dinner assure your host not to panic about preparing something especially for you, as the most important thing to remember is that healthy eating guidelines recommended for everybody are the same for people with diabetes.

If you eat out at restaurants on a regular basis try to avoid eating dishes that are fried, rich in cream or cooked in coconut milk, as they are high in fat. These include kormas and Thai red and green curries. Choose dry tandoori dishes, takda dahl without added oil and tomato-based sabjis. Avoid adding butter, ghee or oils to foods at the table. Indian sweets can be very high in sugar and calories, eg jalebi, gulab jamun, chum chum, barfi and halva, so should be eaten in moderation.



Order boiled rice instead of fried rice and complement your meal with plenty of vegetables and/or salad. When ordering drinks with your meals choose water, diet drinks or no-added-sugar squashes instead of sugary drinks.

Going out for meals could have an impact on the timing of your diabetes medication, so discuss with your healthcare team how best to manage this.

Fasting

It is important that you consult your diabetes healthcare team before undertaking any form of fasting to check that it is safe to do so. You would need to monitor your diabetes more closely and your diabetes treatment would possibly need to be altered during the period. Most religions are sympathetic towards individuals with medical conditions and it is important that you stop fasting if you are feeling unwell. You could make up fasts at a later date. For further information speak to your healthcare team or visit:

www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Food_and_recipes/Fasting_and_diabetes

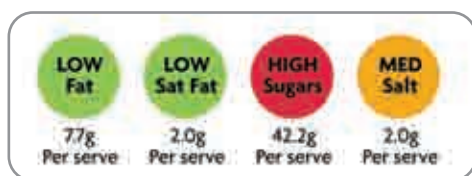
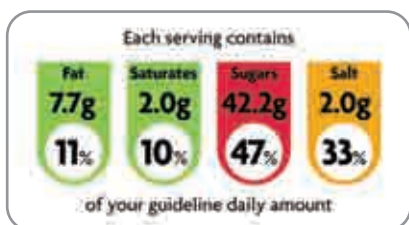


Know your labels

Making sense of food labelling isn't always easy. Both 'Traffic light labelling' and Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs), on food and drink labels, can be a starting point to help you to see how healthy or unhealthy your food or drink is. They also allow you to compare different brands.

Traffic light labelling

The traffic light colours, on the front of some packs, tell you whether the product has low, medium or high amounts of fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt, as shown by the examples below:



Red means high – keep an eye on how often you are choosing these foods. Choose them less often or eat them in smaller quantities.

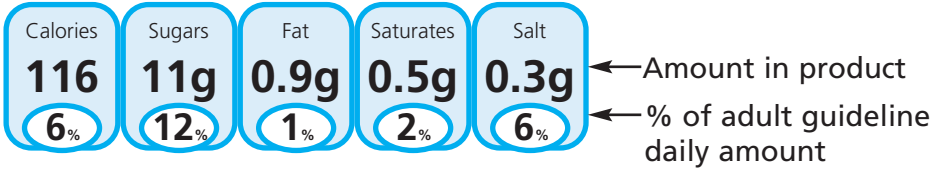
Amber means medium – it's okay to have some of the time but when you have a choice try to go for green.

Green means low – a healthier choice.

Most foods will have a mix of coloured lights so try to choose more products with green and amber and less with red. You don't need to avoid all foods high in fat, sugar or salt – it's the overall balance of your diet that counts. Eaten occasionally, or in small amounts, red foods won't significantly affect your overall diet. If the traffic light label doesn't tell you enough, check the back of packs for detailed information.

Guideline Daily Amounts

Not all manufacturers use the traffic light system so you may see a Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) label on some of the foods you buy such as the example below:



This label provides information on the amount of sugar, fat, saturated fat and salt as well as the number of calories in each portion of the product.

The percentages refer to the proportion of the total amount of the nutrient that is recommended for an average adult per day. These figures are based on GDAs for women to encourage people who need less energy to consume fewer calories.

This system requires a greater level of interpretation than the traffic light system.

For further information about food labelling, see Diabetes UK's useful credit-card sized, fold out leaflet, *Know your labels* (code: 7402).

Foods labelled as 'healthier' choices

Most supermarkets are now offering their own 'healthy-eating' ranges. Although they can help you find healthier options, you still have to think about how the food fits into your diet. It's important not to rely on foods marked as healthy eating options – a healthy diet is made up of a variety of foods. Some products may be labelled as low fat and be high in sugar, and vice versa.

By checking the ingredients list on the label, you can really get to grips with the food's nutritional value. Remember, the ingredients are listed from the highest ingredient first to the lowest ingredient last.

Further information

Diabetes UK Careline

Diabetes UK Careline is here to help. Call 0845 120 2960 for support and information (although unable to provide individual medical advice). BT call from land lines cost no more than 4p per minute; calls from other providers and mobiles may vary.

Diabetes Education Network www.diabetes_education.net

Diabetes UK Publications Tel: 0800 585 088

Diabetes UK website

For an online store tour of Diabetes UK's information guide to food shopping, and menu planning visit www.diabetes.org.uk/storetour



Food allergies

Coeliac UK

Tel: 0870 444 8804
www.coeliac.co.uk

Allergy UK

Tel: 01322 619898 www.allergyuk.org

Anaphylaxis Campaign

Tel: 01252 542029
www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

Special diets

The Vegetarian Society

Tel: 0161 925 2000
www.vegsoc.org

The Vegan Society

Tel: 0845 458 8244
www.vegansociety.com

Weight management

Weight Concern

Tel: 020 7813 6636
www.weightconcern.com

About Diabetes UK

Diabetes UK is the charity for people with diabetes, their family, friends and carers. Our mission is to improve the lives of people with the condition and work towards a future without diabetes.

Diabetes UK is one of the largest patient organisation in Europe. We stand up for the interests of people with diabetes by campaigning for better standards of care. We are one of the main funders of diabetes research in the UK, which includes research into cause and prevention, care and treatment and finding a cure.

We provide practical support and information and safety-net services to help people manage their diabetes.

How can you help?

You can be actively involved in the work Diabetes UK does.

Become a member

call free on 0800 138 5605

Diabetes Campaigners Network

for details call 020 7424 1000

Email dcn@diabetes.org.uk www.diabetes.org.uk/campaigns

Fundraising ideas and events

call 020 7424 1000 email: events.fundraising@diabetes.org.uk

www.diabetes.org.uk/fundraise

Make a donation

call 020 7424 1010 www.diabetes.org.uk/donate

Feedback

We welcome any feedback you may have about this booklet or about any of our publications. **Email: infofeedback@diabetes.org.uk**



Diabetes UK has been certified
as a producer of reliable
healthcare information

Diabetes UK is the charity for people with diabetes, their family, friends, carers and healthcare professionals. Our mission is to improve the lives of people with the condition and work towards a future without diabetes.

There are 2.8 million people in the UK diagnosed with diabetes. We campaign for better standards of diabetes care, fund diabetes research and provide support and information to help people manage their diabetes.

Diabetes UK receives no government funding. We rely on donations to fund our work. To support us, please call 0845 123 2399 during office hours, or visit www.diabetes.org.uk



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