



**Get your health right
See a GP
For a physical health check**

Don't Ignore Diabetes *by Meagan Shand (BSc.Health Promotion) & Maureen Maher (BSc.Health Promotion)*

Diabetes is Australia's fastest growing chronic disease and there is currently no cure. If left undiagnosed or poorly managed it can cause heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, blindness, amputation and impotency. (Diabeteswa, 2007)

Diabetes is a condition in which the body cannot make proper use of carbohydrate in food because the pancreas does not make enough insulin, or the insulin produced is ineffective, or a combination of both. There are two main types of Diabetes, Type I and Type II. Type II Diabetes is the most common, and is often acquired in adult life, the result of an unhealthy lifestyle, physical inactivity and poor diet. (Diabeteswa, 2007)

According to Diabetes WA, of the estimated 1 million Australians with diabetes, half don't know they have it. Warning signs for Type II Diabetes may include: Excessive thirst; Frequent urination; Feeling tired and lethargic; Slow-healing wounds; Itching and skin infections; Blurred vision; Mood swings.

Are you at Risk?

Risk factors for Diabetes include being overweight and leading an inactive, sedentary lifestyle. Diabetes is of concern for people who live with mental illness and the research suggests:

- Nutritional deficiencies, obesity and diabetes are major problems for people who live with mental illness. (Duty to Care Report, 2001)
- Schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are each associated with a higher than average risk of developing diabetes. (Borninkhof,2007)
- Antipsychotic medicines also increase the risk of diabetes, however the level of risk depends on the drug prescribed. (Borninkhof,2007)
- Everyone taking long term antipsychotics should be closely monitored for signs of diabetes. (Borninkhof,2007)

What can you do to reduce the risk?

According to Diabetes WA, if you maintain a healthy weight, do regular physical activity and follow a healthy eating plan you can reduce your risk of developing Type II diabetes by as much as 60%.

HealthRight Nutritionist, Jo Beer suggests that eating more fruit and vegetables and wholegrain breads is the key to staying healthy and reducing the risks of diabetes.

"These foods are processed more slowly by the body and give a more constant form of energy. Junk food, chips, cakes and cool drinks not only lead to weight gain but affect your energy levels too. They are more likely to cause energy "highs" and "lows", which can complicate mental illness symptoms." says Jo



Pauline Miles offers Tony a serve of Healthy Food at the Health Right Art Project Launch.

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“Maintaining a healthy weight is important for staying healthy and reducing the risk of diabetes” says Jo. “If people find it hard to make changes to their diet, reducing the amount you eat so you have smaller portions is a good start”

The important message is ‘Diabetes is serious, don’t ignore diabetes’. If you think you or someone you know may be at risk, help them to See a GP.

Healthy eating has many benefits

HealthRight Champion Pauline Miles learnt from an early age the importance of a healthy diet. Her family was involved in hotel catering, and from this focus on food came an appreciation for the benefits of eating well and the joy and nourishment associated with sharing a meal.

Such was the inspiration for her artwork- The Feast, which won a prize in the recent HealthRight Healthy Body Healthy Mind Art Competition. The artwork depicts a creative menu of simple foods and friends sharing a meal.

Pauline advice is to “keep it simple” when preparing food and always use seasonal fruits and vegetables. Over the years, Pauline has learnt the importance of eating well in managing her mental illness and maintaining good physical health.

“Eating good food has many benefits” says Pauline. “I feel a lot healthier and that makes me feel generally happier so I cope with stress and anxiety so much better. Preparing a healthy meal gives a sense of control over what I put in my mouth and that builds self esteem and confidence and shopping for food gets me out in the community and meeting people, which also benefits mental health.”

Naturally creative, Pauline enjoys preparing food, but understands that some people don’t enjoy cooking, have limited budgets or don’t feel up to it if they are not feeling well.

Cooking a big meal and freezing portions for later use, keeping staples like porridge, eggs, milk or juice in the fridge and cooking with others are all ways to improve eating habits and physical health.

You can choose to eat for health, many people who live with mental illness have proven that with the right support and information they can eat better and control their weight.

Find out more:

References and Links

Borninkhof(2007): Mental Health Awareness. www.healthright.org.au/download.cfm?DownloadFile=3751F364-96BA-5DAE-B2B7510D6FB73EEE

Duty to Care Report (2001): www.healthright.org.au/go/top-nav/about-healthright

Diabetes WA: www.diabeteswa.com.au

Don’t Ignore Diabetes : www.dontignorediabetes.com.au

Help people to reduce the risk : www.healthright.org.au/go/healthy-lifestyles

Help someone to See a GP for Physical Health Check: www.healthright.org.au/go/seeagp/fasttrack

www.healthright.org.au