

# ARE YOU REALLY GETTING YOUR 15



## 15 HEALTHCARE ESSENTIALS

Having the right care is essential for the wellbeing of all people with diabetes. There is a minimum level of healthcare that every person with diabetes deserves and should expect. This guide explains each of the essential checks (which should always be carried out by a healthcare professional) and why each check is important. It also gives information on what you can do if you aren't getting all the care you need.

### THE ESSENTIAL CHECK

### WHAT THIS MEANS

#### 1 GET YOUR BLOOD GLUCOSE LEVELS MEASURED

Having an HbA1c blood test, at least once a year, to measure your long-term blood glucose control (as well as other blood glucose testing you do). This is a good way to check how well your diabetes is being managed. For most adults, the target is less than 48mmol/mol (6.5%). Your doctor will tell you the target that is most appropriate for you. Visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/hba1c](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/hba1c) for more information.

#### 2 HAVE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE MEASURED

Having a blood pressure check at least once a year. Most adults with diabetes should have and aim for a reading no higher than 130/80mmHg. Your doctor will set the target that is most appropriate for you. High blood pressure increases your risk of complications, including cardiovascular disease.

#### 3 HAVE YOUR BLOOD FATS (CHOLESTEROL) MEASURED

Having a blood test every year to measure your levels of good (HDL) and bad (LDL and triglyceride) fats. If your blood fat levels are too high your doctor or nurse can advise you on the best way to manage this. People with diabetes are at greater risk of cardiovascular disease, and high cholesterol which further increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

#### 4 HAVE YOUR EYES SCREENED

Having a specialist take a photo of each eye to look for any changes to your retina (the seeing part at the back of your eye). You should receive an invite for this check every year. This is different to the tests carried out at a routine eye appointment with an optician. Retinopathy (damage to the retina) is a complication that can affect anyone with diabetes. Visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/eyes](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/eyes) for more details.

## THE ESSENTIAL CHECK

## WHAT THIS MEANS

### 5 HAVE YOUR FEET CHECKED

Taking off your shoes and socks and having a trained healthcare professional look at and touch your legs and feet to check for numbness, poor circulation, corns, calluses, nail problems and other conditions. After your annual foot check, you should be told what your risk of developing any problems is and, if necessary, be referred to a foot specialist (podiatrist). Diabetes is a cause of foot diseases which can lead to complications including amputation. At home, you can help keep your feet healthy by doing our Touch the Toes test ([www.diabetes.org.uk/Touch-the-Toes-test](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Touch-the-Toes-test)). If you find anything unusual visit your doctor and ask for a check straight away.

### 6 HAVE YOUR KIDNEY FUNCTION MONITORED

Having two tests – a urine and a blood test – to check your kidneys are working properly. Picking up on any problems at an early stage means there is a greater chance of treating these successfully. Kidney disease is much more common in people with diabetes and people with high blood pressure.

### 7 HAVE YOUR WEIGHT CHECKED

Being weighed on scales (or having your BMI or waist measured). Your doctor or nurse will tell you if you need to lose weight and may also refer you to a dietitian or an exercise specialist to exercise on prescription. You can also keep an eye on your weight by checking this regularly at home. Keeping to a healthy weight benefits your health in lots of ways, including helping to prevent heart disease and stroke.

### 8 GET SUPPORT IF YOU ARE A SMOKER

Being offered free help to quit if you smoke. You could be offered a one-to-one appointment with a stop smoking adviser or the option to attend a stop smoking clinic. Having diabetes puts a person at increased risk of heart disease and stroke, and smoking further increases this risk. Visit [www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk) for more information.

### 9 RECEIVE CARE PLANNING TO MEET YOUR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Agreeing a personalised diabetes care plan to meet your needs, and taking home a written summary of the goals you agree with your healthcare professional. Care planning is a partnership between you and the healthcare professionals who look after all the different aspects of your diabetes. It can help you to manage your diabetes better.\*

\*If you live in Northern Ireland, care planning is different. Talk to your diabetes healthcare team.

### 10 ATTEND AN EDUCATION COURSE

Being asked if you would like to attend an education course in your area – either in a one-to-one session or as part of a group. This can help you to understand and manage your diabetes better, and reduce the risk of complications later on.

### 11 RECEIVE PAEDIATRIC CARE IF YOU ARE A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

Every child or young person should receive care from a specialist diabetes paediatric healthcare team – experts in managing the condition in children. This is likely to involve regular appointments at a hospital or clinic to make sure the condition is being well controlled. Children receive more checks than adults. From the age of 12, an annual diabetes review should take place that includes many of the healthcare essentials.

## THE ESSENTIAL CHECK

## WHAT THIS MEANS

### **12** RECEIVE HIGH QUALITY CARE IF ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL

Having diabetes specialists involved in decisions about your care and treatment if you are ever admitted to hospital, for any reason. Being in hospital and out of your normal routine or regime can affect your diabetes management. It is important that your diabetes care is always well managed and this is even more crucial when you are unwell. Visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/care-in-hospital](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/care-in-hospital).

### **13** GET INFORMATION AND SPECIALIST CARE IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO HAVE A BABY

Having a conversation with a healthcare professional and receiving help to monitor your diabetes more closely before, during and after pregnancy. You should see a specialist healthcare professional at every stage – from the very beginning when you are thinking about becoming pregnant (preconception) through to post-natal care. Managing the condition more carefully means you are more likely to enjoy a healthy pregnancy and have a healthy baby. Visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/pregnancy](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/pregnancy) for more details.

### **14** SEE SPECIALIST HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Being referred to the right diabetes specialist when necessary. Depending on your situation, you may need to see any one of a range of specialists, including ophthalmologists, podiatrists and dietitians. Diabetes affects different parts of your body. Seeing the right specialist at the right time will help you manage your diabetes and may help to reduce your risk of developing complications.

### **15** GET EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Being offered support and the opportunity to talk to someone about your diabetes and your feelings, who is appropriately qualified to help you. This is important if there are any issues or concerns you would like to talk about.

## What to do if you are not getting the 15 Healthcare Essentials

If you have any questions or concerns about your checks or if there are any checks you are not getting, it is important to speak to your doctor or healthcare professional. It may also be that you have been waiting a long time for your diabetes check up or have problems arranging your appointment. You may find it helpful to take a copy of this guide with you to help your discussion.

### Making a complaint

If you are not happy with the response you receive from your healthcare professional you can ask for a copy of their complaints procedure. The complaints procedure should give details of who to make the complaint to and any time limits. If you are unable to complain yourself, you may want to ask a relative or friend to help.

Put your complaint in writing and keep a copy of it and any response you receive. Explain what you are dissatisfied about and what you would like to happen as a result of your complaint. If you receive a response by telephone ask them to put their response in writing to you. For more information about making a complaint, visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/advocacy](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/advocacy).

There are a different series of steps to follow in each nation and different organisations that can provide advice and support. For more details, visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/your-concerns](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/your-concerns).

If you are not happy with the response you receive you can refer your complaint to the Ombudsman. Visit [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) for information on the Ombudsman.

### Getting involved

There are several reasons why you may not be receiving the minimum level of care as outlined in the *15 Healthcare Essentials* from your diabetes healthcare team. If you would like to get involved in the planning and organisation of your diabetes services, ask at your GP practice if there is a user group or patient forum and how you can get in touch.

To learn about how you can shape your local diabetes services and care, contact us at [diabetesvoices@diabetes.org.uk](mailto:diabetesvoices@diabetes.org.uk) or by telephone on **020 7424 1000**.

For other ways to get involved and have a say, visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/Voices](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Voices).

Become a member of Diabetes UK – [www.diabetes.org.uk/membership](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/membership) or call **0845 123 2399**.

For advice and support call our Careline **0845 120 2960**.

