



Being an  
active partner  
in your care

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## DIABETES: SELF CARE REALLY MATTERS

Learning about diabetes is the first step in diabetes self care. Talk to your GP and healthcare team about tests and health checks you need and the best way you can help to reduce your risk of diabetes related complications.

### ? How can I take charge of my diabetes?

Self care is about being in charge of the choices you make each day. Taking care of yourself includes:



#### Being active each day

If you're not sure what exercises you should do, an exercise physiologist can develop an exercise plan tailored to you.



#### Losing weight if required

If you are overweight, even losing some weight helps reduce your blood pressure, blood glucose levels, and cholesterol (blood fats).



#### Eating a dietitian-recommended diet

If you're not sure about your diet, a dietitian can help you establish healthy eating habits.



#### Quitting smoking

It's not easy to quit smoking; if you feel you need help to give up smoking, talk with your GP or call the Quitline on 137 848. For more information go to: [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au)



#### Taking your medicines as prescribed by your doctor

Your GP and pharmacist can help you manage your medicines. Ask your GP if you need a DVA-funded Home Medicines Review, where a pharmacist will review your medicines and help you get the most benefit from them.



#### Making sure you get the tests and health checks that you need

All of these can help you manage your blood glucose levels, weight and blood pressure.

## ? How can diabetes affect my health?

The pancreas makes insulin to keep blood glucose (sugar) levels within a healthy range. In diabetes, the body does not use insulin properly or slowly loses the ability to produce enough insulin. The resulting high blood glucose levels may lead, over time, to complications that can affect the whole

body including the brain, skin, eyes, mouth, feet, heart, kidneys, blood vessels and nerves. Complications can include heart attacks, strokes and poor blood flow to the legs. Living with diabetes can also impact on a person's mental health.

## ? Knowing what tests and health checks you need

The Annual Diabetes Cycle of Care can help you and your GP keep track of the tests and health checks that you need. Remember these dates are just a guide; follow the advice of your GP and healthcare team.

### Tests and health checks that you need

#### At least once every 6 months



#### What is your blood pressure reading?

Keeping your blood pressure on target reduces the risk of stroke, nerve damage, and heart, kidney and eye disease. Ask your GP about a blood pressure target to meet your health needs, especially if you already have heart or kidney disease.



#### Do you know what your weight and body mass index (BMI) are?

The BMI assesses whether you are within a healthy weight range. Talk with your GP about what weight and BMI targets are right for you.



#### Have you checked your feet today?

Checking your feet every day is essential when you have diabetes. Check for any signs of numbness, ulcers, nail changes, blisters, cuts, bruising, swelling, redness or pain. Your GP, podiatrist, diabetes educator or practice nurse can assess your feet to check if diabetes is affecting the blood supply and nerves to your feet.

## At least once every 12 months



### Do you know your HbA1c?

HbA1c is a blood test that indicates what your blood glucose levels have been over the last 10 to 12 weeks. It's an important test that shows how well you are managing your diabetes. HbA1c targets can be different for different people, so discuss what your HbA1c target is with your doctor.



### Do you know your cholesterol levels?

Healthy cholesterol levels reduce your risk of diabetes related complications. A cholesterol blood test can include checks for HDL (good) cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, total cholesterol, and triglycerides (another type of blood fats).



### Have you had a kidney function check?

High blood glucose and blood pressure damage the filtration units in your kidneys. Your doctor will arrange a urine test to check for protein in your urine and a blood test to check your kidney function. These two tests can tell you if diabetes is affecting your kidneys.

## At least once every 24 months



### Have you had your eyes checked?

Diabetes can damage the small vessels at the back of your eyes without you knowing about it, and is the most common cause of vision loss in adults. Have your eyes checked by an optometrist or eye specialist for diabetes related damage. If you notice any changes in your sight, talk to your GP or eye specialist as soon as possible.

## Tips to help you remember these tests and health checks

Plan ahead to set up regular appointments for your diabetes tests and health checks. To help you remember you could:

- ✓ use the tests and health checks list in this brochure
- ✓ make a note in your diary or calendar
- ✓ organise these health checks at a similar time each year
- ✓ ask if you can receive a reminder notice from your GP or practice nurse



## ? Who can be on my diabetes healthcare team?

You are the most important member of your healthcare team. Talk with your GP about who could be on your team; people such as:

- a diabetes educator
- a dietitian
- an exercise physiologist
- an optometrist or eye specialist
- a podiatrist
- a dentist
- a practice nurse or community care nurse
- a pharmacist
- an endocrinologist
- a geriatrician
- a psychologist, counsellor or social worker
- other health professionals as recommended by your GP
- family, friends and carers.

## ? Where can I find more information about diabetes?

Your GP, diabetes educator and other members of your healthcare team can help you to better understand and manage your diabetes.

### The following links may be helpful to you when seeking more information about diabetes:



#### Diabetes Australia

[www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)

Diabetes Australia provides support, information and subsidised diabetes items for people living with all types of diabetes. It assists with administration of the **National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS)**, 1300 136 588 or [www.ndss.com.au](http://www.ndss.com.au)

Registering with the NDSS enables access to a range of government approved diabetes resources and items.



#### Department of Veterans' Affairs – Diabetes

[www.veteransmates.net.au/dva.diabetes-services](http://www.veteransmates.net.au/dva.diabetes-services)

This link provides information about diabetes services available to you, including how to access DVA-funded membership to your local diabetes organisation.



#### Department of Veterans' Affairs – Heart Health Programme

[www.veteransmates.net.au/dva.heart-health-programme](http://www.veteransmates.net.au/dva.heart-health-programme)

This is a 52-week program for eligible veterans with topics including nutrition, physical activity, quitting smoking, responsible alcohol consumption, chronic conditions, stress management and maintaining a healthy heart.