

FIVE DIABETES MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS



Did you know there are an estimated 1.3 million adults living with undiagnosed diabetes in South Africa? In fact, 50% of people with type 2 diabetes don't know they have it. Get your stats and facts here.

The number of people with type 2 diabetes is increasing in every country, and the World Health Organization predicts that diabetes will be the seventh leading cause of death worldwide by 2030.

As chances are pretty high that you know someone who is pre-diabetic or who already suffers from the condition, clue yourself up.

1. Type 2 diabetes is “not so bad”

A common myth about diabetes is that type 1 is the “bad” kind of diabetes and type 2 is the less serious or “good” kind. It's not clear where this idea started, but it could be our fear of needles. People with type 1 diabetes need insulin injections to control their blood sugar, while people with type 2 diabetes can usually control their blood sugar with oral medicine and lifestyle changes, or even by lifestyle changes alone.

However, some people with type 2 diabetes also have to inject themselves with insulin as diabetes can worsen over time. Both types of diabetes can lead to serious health complications, such as heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney failure, and nerve damage that can result in having to amputate limbs.

2. Thin people can't get type 2 diabetes

Being overweight is a major risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes. Being even slightly overweight increases diabetes risk by up to five times, according to research done by Harvard School of Public Health Professor Walter Willett, and being seriously obese increases it 60 times.

But being overweight is not the only major risk factor for type 2 diabetes. Genetics are just as important. People with a family history of diabetes are at higher risk for both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Smoking also increases the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

3. People with diabetes have to eat small, frequent meals

If you have low blood sugar, you have to eat frequently to keep your blood sugar stable. It's easy to assume that anyone with diabetes has to eat small meals and snacks to keep them going. Unfortunately, it's not that simple.

Both high blood sugar (hyperglycaemia) and low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia) are common in people with diabetes. If there is too much glucose in a person's blood, frequent snacking will only make the condition worse. Each person with diabetes has to have their own eating plan that works for their bodies. This can involve anything from regular small meals to fasting.

4. Eating some really sweet will “give you” diabetes

Type 1 diabetes is genetic and type 2 is influenced by genetics and other factors. About 80% of cases of type 2 diabetes are linked to lifestyle factors. But if you don't have diabetes and eat something ridiculously sweet only every now and then, the sugar won't automatically “give you” diabetes.

This doesn't give you a free pass to indulge. A review of research published in the journal *Diabetes Care* indicated that people who had one to two servings of soft drinks a day had a 26% greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those who had no soft drinks or less than one a month.

5. You can't get type 2 diabetes if you lead a healthy lifestyle

Since 80% of type 2 diabetes is triggered by lifestyle factors, it's easy to assume that following a healthy eating plan and exercising regularly means you're immune. Unfortunately, there are other factors that can prevent the pancreas from producing enough insulin or prevent the body from responding to insulin normally.

Some medical conditions, such as polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), increase the risk for type 2 diabetes. PCOS is related to insulin resistance. With PCOS, cysts form in the ovaries, and one possible cause is insulin resistance. You could also develop diabetes if you are involved in an accident that damages your pancreas.

So, don't rely on assumptions instead of facts – rather, seek out reputable sources for health information, and if you need help to manage the condition, get guidance from a healthcare professional.