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Type 2 diabetes in children and adolescents: Challenges for treatment and potential solutions

Ivy Lee Jia Jia ¹, Simona Zampetti ², Paolo Pozzilli ³, Raffaella Buzzetti ⁴

Affiliations

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Abstract

Historically perceived as a disease mainly affecting adults, the prevalence of type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) among children and adolescents has been rising, mirroring the increasing rates of childhood obesity. Currently, youth-onset T2DM poses a significant public health challenge globally. Treating youth-onset T2DM poses numerous critical challenges, namely limited and inadequate therapeutic options, and difficulties with conducting therapeutic studies. As a result, current treatment guidelines are based on adult studies and expert consensus. Few prominent guidelines on the treatment of youth-onset T2DM have been published recently, i.e., by the American Diabetes Association (ADA) 2024, National Institute for Healthcare and Excellence United Kingdom (NICE UK) 2023, International Society Paediatric and Adolescents Diabetes (ISPAD) 2022, Australasian Paediatric Endocrine Group (APEG) 2020 and Diabetes Canada 2018. This review first explores the unique aspects of youth-onset T2DM. It then summarises the different treatment guidelines, discusses the different treatment modalities based on available evidence and identifies any gaps. The review also explores challenges in the treatment of youth-onset T2DM with potential solutions and discusses recent trials on the treatment of youth-onset T2DM. Continued research aims to optimise treatment, improve outcomes, and alleviate the burden of T2DM on youths.

Keywords: Adolescent Diabetes; Childhood Obesity; Diabetes Guidelines; Diabetes Management in Adolescents; Paediatric Diabetes; Type 2 diabetes.

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