

Star Special

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WORLD DIABETES DAY

Transforming risk to resilience

CARDIOVASCULAR disease is still the leading cause of death worldwide, representing a silent epidemic affecting millions of lives every year. Experts agree that reducing the risk of heart disease is the best defence against this silent epidemic.

However, in our fast-paced world, it can be hard to make our heart health a priority while juggling the demands of daily life. Recognising that heart disease is a multifaceted problem, Institut Jantung Negara (IJN) has set up its Cardiovascular Risk Reduction Clinic (CRRC) to support and empower patients in managing their heart health. Rather than focusing solely on the heart, the CRRC encompasses the management of related conditions, including diabetes, lipid management, hypertension and obesity.

The CRRC places prevention and early intervention at its core by helping patients identify and address risk factors head-on. This proactive approach serves to guide patients in embracing healthier habits to not only manage their current health conditions but also minimise their risk of developing more severe complications later on. The CRRC also adopts a patient-centred philosophy, where the patients actively partner with medical experts to devise a plan of action that fits with their health goals. This includes routine check-ups, a balanced dietary regimen, exercise routines, stress management strategies and other measures to fortify the heart's resilience.

Another key factor in the CRRC's success thus far lies in its multidisciplinary approach. Bringing together a diverse team of healthcare professionals under one roof, the clinic employs collaboration to offer



CRRC dietitians work with patients to create healthy meal plans and educating them on making informed food choices.



comprehensive and personalised care. For instance, the clinic's specialist physicians manage patients' treatment plans, adjusting them to suit the patient's unique needs through continuous evaluation and monitoring.

This is complemented by nurse educators, who equip patients with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate their heart health with confidence. These highly-trained nurse educators are also able to work with patients in problem-solving – that is, identifying their personal barriers to good heart health and brainstorming creative ways of overcoming them.

With nutrition being pivotal for optimal heart health, the CRRC's dietitians work closely with patients to create individualised, heart-healthy meal plans.

This includes educating people on making informed food choices such as reducing the intake of salt and saturated fat while increasing the consumption of heart-boosting nutrients. Similarly, the clinic's physiotherapists help patients develop customised fitness plans that cater to patients' needs and limitations.

It is never too late to pursue a healthier and more fulfilling life, especially when it comes to your heart. With its wealth of expertise and pragmatic approach, the CRRC can help you take that first step towards better heart health and an increased quality of life.

■ For more information, call 03-2617 8200.

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Challenges for people living with diabetes

DIABETES is a metabolic disorder that occurs when your body does not produce enough insulin, or it can't effectively use the insulin it produces. High blood glucose in your blood vessels can lead to many complications and even cause death.

According to the International Diabetes Federation figures in 2019, approximately 463 million adults (20-79 years) were living with diabetes and this is projected to increase to 700 million by 2045, while more than an estimated 1.1 million children and adolescents are living with type 1 diabetes. Southeast Asia currently has the highest number of people with prediabetes and by 2025, this region is expected to have the highest prevalence of diabetes.

According to the 2019 National Health and Morbidity Survey among ethnic groups, Indians had the highest prevalence of known diabetes (18.5%), followed by Malays (11%), Chinese (8.5%) and Sarawakian Bumiputras (7.9%).

Among those with known diabetes, 25.7% were on insulin therapy, 85.6% on oral antidiabetic drugs, 88% had received specific diabetic diet advice from healthcare personnel, 75.4% claimed to have been advised to lose weight and 23% opted for traditional and complementary medication.

The difference in number could be due to genetic factors, obesity, physical

inactivity and unhealthy diet. Among the Asian population, insulin resistance and visceral adiposity are the main key factors. Fat has also been linked to metabolic disturbances and increased risk for cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes mellitus.

MSU Medical Centre consultant physician and endocrinologist Dr Rohaya Abdul Razak explains, "Diabetes is a progressive life-long disease that affects our body's ability to properly regulate glucose use for growth and energy. Glucose is the main source of energy for our body. When it is not properly managed, it will lead to high blood glucose levels that will cause damage to many target organs mainly the heart, kidney, eye, brain and nerves. The implications of having diabetes include physical disability, emotional and psychological impacts, financial burdens and more."

Type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1DM) which occurs when the pancreas cannot produce insulin. This is because the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas are destroyed by an autoimmune process.

Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) occurs when the pancreas does not produce sufficient insulin or when the insulin does not work properly due to the presence of insulin resistance.

Gestational diabetes (GDM) occurs when hormonal changes occur during pregnancy causing a rise in blood glucose



Dr Rohaya Abdul Razak.

level. This usually resolves after childbirth.

In early 2021, Malaysia launched its new *Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG)* for the management of T2DM. In this new guideline, there are recommendations for the management of diabetes which include several new classes of diabetic medications not only to lower high blood glucose levels but also offer cardiovascular and kidney protection from diabetes-related damage.

Recent studies also showed losing weight with diet and lifestyle changes can prevent prediabetic people from becoming diabetic. For those people

with newly diagnosed T2DM (less than three years), they can reverse their diabetes by losing 15% of their body weight and maintaining it. It also benefits the liver by improving non-alcoholic liver disease, which if left untreated, may lead to liver damage, scarring and cancer.

People with diabetes tend to experience more severe forms of Covid-19 infection and have a higher risk of death than non-diabetics.

Therefore, the best course of action is to make sure the glycaemic control is good with regular monitoring and compliance to treatment. Also, you should consider getting vaccinated to reduce your chance of getting the virus.

People with diabetes should step up all measures of self-care to stay safe and healthy.

1) Continue taking regular medications. For those who are on injections, especially insulin, ensure you have enough supply of insulin needles and glucose strips as well.

2) Try to keep the blood glucose well controlled. If your blood glucose becomes unstable, see your healthcare provider immediately.

3) You should aim to increase the intensity or keep to a regular exercise routine.

4) Avoid eating unhealthy foods.

5) Do not skip your routine follow-up sessions with your regular physician.

AS you know, diabetes is a chronic condition which is associated with abnormally high levels of glucose in the blood. However, are you aware that individuals with diabetes are at an increased risk of developing cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) such as heart disease and stroke, which have been the leading causes of mortality in Malaysia over the years, accounting for approximately 35% of total deaths?⁽¹⁾ According to the *National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS)*, the prevalence of diabetes among Malaysians has demonstrated an increasing trend from 13.4% in 2015 to 18.3% in 2019⁽²⁾. While most of the rise in the prevalence of diabetes is seen in the middle-aged and elderly, there is an increasing trend found in young adults as well⁽³⁾.

In this day and age, it is easy for people of almost any age from working-age individuals to retired elderlies to slip into unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles. Eating unhealthy snacks such as kuih muih and apam balik which are often high in sugar, sodium and fat in between meals can lead to weight gain, especially when physical activity is reduced. Consequently, weight gain can contribute to being overweight and obesity which increase the risk of developing diabetes.

Hence, what can you do to bring a different approach to staying healthy at present times like this? If you are struggling to break away from a sedentary lifestyle, you can try to start with brisk walking or simple home workouts such as jumping jacks, push-ups, squats and planks. Diet modifications such as adopting a high-fibre and low glycaemic index (GI) diet can help regulate blood glucose levels and lower the risk of developing diabetes. This results in a stabilised blood glucose level as it leads to a slow, steady rise in blood glucose level and then followed by a gradual drop

Oat to a healthier you

rather than a sudden spike in blood glucose level which often leads to fatigue and tiredness.

Oat beta-glucan is a soluble dietary fibre which can be found in oat bran, the outer layer of an oat grain. It has been reported that the high viscosity of the oat beta-glucan plays a vital role in regulating blood glucose levels⁽⁴⁾, and such beneficial health effect is associated with its daily dose and molecular weight. The high molecular weight of oat beta-glucan has been mainly attributed to its ability to form a viscous gel which acts as a barrier in the small intestine that delays the digestion of carbohydrates and absorption of glucose. Thus, it helps to prevent sudden fluctuations in blood glucose levels and abnormal insulin secretion after a meal, resulting in stabilised glucose availability.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia and the European Commission have approved oat beta-glucan and its role in controlling post-meal high blood glucose levels with the following approved health claims:

- 3g of oat beta-glucan daily helps to lower blood cholesterol levels
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- Consumption of beta-glucan from oats contributes to the reduction of the glucose rise after a meal.

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Clinically proven bioactive oat beta-glucan is suitable for pre-diabetic and diabetic individuals.



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*Bioactive oat beta-glucans are high in molecular weight and have been

scientifically shown to produce a good viscosity effect in the gut for optimal cholesterol-lowering effect⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ *Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD) Country Profiles*. World Health Organization. 2018.

⁽²⁾ Alberti G et al. *Type 2 Diabetes in the Young: The Evolving Epidemic. The International Diabetes Federation Consensus Workshop*. 2004; 27(7), 1798-1811.

⁽³⁾ *Survey: 1.7 million Malaysians Risk Three Chronic Conditions*. CodeBlue. 2020.

⁽⁴⁾ Daou C & Zhang H. *Oat Beta-Glucan: Its Role in Health Promotion and Prevention of Diseases. Comprehensive Reviews in Food Science and Food Safety*. 2012; 4(11), 355-365.

⁽⁵⁾ *EFSA Journal* 2010; 8(12):1885 & 2011; 9(6):2207.

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As we turn to the new chapter, our stories will continue to be written. For each and every one of you who have made this possible, we thank you.

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Relieving joint pain

IF climbing stairs feels like a battle and stiff joints make getting out of bed in the morning a struggle, you may be suffering from joint pain. Sometimes, joint pain is just an annoyance that comes and goes. But in more severe cases, it can lead to aggravating pain, swelling and stiffness, making it difficult to perform daily tasks. Joint pain can have multiple causes and attack different parts of your body: spine, neck, knees, feet, ankles, hands, wrists or shoulders.

While joint pain usually affects older adults, it can also develop in younger men and women of any age. For those with a busy and active lifestyle, do you dread dealing with cranky joints and muscle soreness after pushing through an intense workout? Those repetitive movements can wear down your joints, leaving you feeling achy. Additionally, vigorous exercise triggers an inflammatory response and the release of free radicals that can potentially damage your muscles. This discomfort can significantly hinder your daily mobility.

Fear not, there is a natural remedy

to help you refuel and recover. Turmeric, renowned for its potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, is linked to alleviating joint pain and muscle soreness. HydroCurc turmeric extract uses LipiSpurse technology that allows curcuminoids to freely disperse in water for maximum absorption in the body. It delivers curcuminoids faster than standard curcumin extracts while reaching the highest levels of bioavailability on the market today.

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This informational article is brought to you by VitaHealth.

■ For enquiries, call 1800 183 288.



Dealing with pins and needles

HAVE you ever found yourself tossing and turning at night due to a burning pain in your feet, or perhaps experienced the sensation of walking on clouds during your daily strolls?

These peculiar sensations might not seem like a big deal at first, but they could be warning signs of a condition known as peripheral neuropathy, where the nerves in your body are damaged. Neuropathy can be caused by a wide range of factors. One of the key culprits is diabetes, which should not be underestimated.

Like many countries around the world, diabetes is becoming a major health issue in Malaysia. According to the 2021 National Diabetes Registry Report, seven million Malaysian adults are likely to develop diabetes by 2025, an alarming trend that will see a diabetes prevalence of 31.3% for adults aged 18 years and above.

Do not ignore

Several symptoms of diabetes-related neuropathy of the feet include:

- **Numbness:** Nerve damage can lead to a loss of sensation in the feet, making it challenging to detect injuries, cuts or other problems. This lack of awareness increases the risk of complications.

- **Skin changes:** Diabetes can affect the skin on the feet, causing dryness, cracking and an increased susceptibility to infections. Proper foot care is essential to prevent these issues.

- **Slow wound healing:** People with diabetes often experience delayed or poor wound healing. Cuts, blisters and sores may take longer to heal properly, increasing the risk of complications.

Take note of the symptoms, as neglecting them can give rise to the following issues:

- **Foot deformities:** Over time, diabetes-related neuropathy can cause changes in the shape of the feet, such as the formation of bunions or hammertoes. These deformities can create pressure points that increase the risk of developing sores or ulcers.

- **Ulcers and sores:** The onset of numbness in the feet can lead to the development of ulcers and sores, which often go unnoticed.

The latest Management of Diabetic Foot guidelines from the Health Ministry reveal that approximately 80% of lower leg amputations among diabetics occur as

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Care for Life

Proper foot care

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a consequence of foot ulcers. Thus, it is crucial to keep in mind the importance of foot care if you have diabetes.

Learning to cope

Preventing diabetic foot complications begins with effective diabetes management and a focus on foot care. Here are some essential preventive measures:

- Consistently monitor and manage your blood sugar levels. Work closely with your healthcare team to create a personalised diabetes management plan.
- Perform daily foot checks to identify any signs of injury or infection. Look for cuts, blisters, redness or swelling. Do not attempt to treat these yourself, make sure to visit your doctor.
- Opt for proper fit, comfortable footwear that provides excellent support and ample cushioning. Whenever you're indoors, make it a habit to wear socks or comfortable slippers. Steer clear of snug or high-heeled shoes as they can add unnecessary strain to your feet.
- Wash your feet daily with mild

soap and warm water, but do not soak them and gently pat them dry. Apply moisturiser to prevent dryness but avoid applying it between your toes as it can lead to infection.

- Trim your toenails straight across and avoid cutting into the corners to prevent ingrown toenails. Make sure to use a nail file to smooth any sharp edges.
- Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can worsen circulation and hinder the healing process. Quitting smoking and moderating alcohol intake can benefit your overall health and foot health.
- Arrange regular check-ups with a podiatrist who can assist in addressing any pre-existing foot issues and offer advice on maintaining proper foot health. Custom orthotic devices or shoe modifications may help relieve pressure and prevent ulcers.

Preventing severe foot complications is achievable for the majority of individuals living with diabetes. Consistent self-care and attending all scheduled medical appointments are your strongest allies in safeguarding your feet.



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1. EFSA Journal 2010; 8(12): 1885;
2. Diets that are of low in GI and high in dietary fiber are protective – WHO Europe Diabetes

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DIABETES is a complex condition influenced by a combination of factors, primarily genetics and lifestyle choices. This complexity emphasises its far-reaching impact, as it substantially increases the risk of various health issues including heart disease and stroke; and eye issues like diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. Additionally, it can lead to foot problems such as diabetic foot ulcers which may result in amputations.

Consultant internal medicine physician and endocrinologist at Damansara Specialist Hospital 2 Dr Sharifah Faradila Wan Muhamad Hatta shares, "Many people have the misconception that diabetes results from excessive sugar consumption, but this is far from the complete truth."

It's not just about sugar



Dr Sharifah Faradila Wan Muhamad Hatta.



Maintaining a regular physical activity routine can help to reduce blood sugar levels and enhance insulin sensitivity.

like obstructive sleep apnoea and chronic stress further contribute to the complex risk of type 2 diabetes.

Taking charge

To effectively manage diabetes, various lifestyle changes are crucial. These include adopting healthy eating habits, focusing on a balanced diet with appropriate portion sizes, monitoring carbohydrate intake, and opting for whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and healthy fats while limiting added sugars and processed foods.

Dr Sharifah further notes, "Engaging in regular physical activity, with at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise per week, along with strength training exercises at least twice weekly, is vital for lowering blood sugar levels and improving insulin sensitivity."

Additionally, maintaining a healthy weight through modest weight loss, monitoring blood sugar levels, adhering to prescribed medications, managing stress, ensuring adequate sleep and consuming alcohol in moderation is essential for a comprehensive approach to diabetes management.

■ For more information, call 03-7717 3000.

Understanding types

Type 1 diabetes (juvenile or insulin-dependent diabetes) can appear at any age but usually starts in childhood or adolescence due to an autoimmune response that mistakenly attacks and destroys insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas.

Next, type 2 diabetes (adult-onset or non-insulin-dependent diabetes) is primarily characterised by insulin resistance and reduced insulin production. "While type 2 diabetes is more common in older adults, it is increasingly diagnosed in younger people, including children and adolescents," Dr Sharifah shares.

According to the 2021 National Diabetes Registry Report, seven

million Malaysian adults are likely to develop diabetes by 2025. This is an alarming trend that will result in a diabetes prevalence of 31.3% for adults aged 18 years and above.

Some less common forms of diabetes include gestational diabetes which develops during pregnancy and usually goes away after childbirth. However, it increases the risk of type 2 diabetes for both the mother and the child later in life.

Prediabetes, not a separate type of diabetes, is a condition characterised by higher blood sugar levels that aren't quite high enough for a type 2 diabetes diagnosis.

Dr Sharifah explains, "Prediabetes provides an

opportunity for early intervention through lifestyle changes to prevent the progression to full-blown type 2 diabetes."

Knowing your risk

Several factors contribute to the risk of type 2 diabetes. Insulin resistance, a primary factor, arises when the body's cells fail to respond adequately to insulin, the hormone responsible for blood sugar regulation, leading to elevated blood sugar levels.

Obesity, particularly abdominal obesity, is strongly linked to type 2 diabetes risk, as fat cells in the abdomen release substances that promote insulin resistance. Unhealthy diets high in refined

carbohydrates, added sugars and unhealthy fats can lead to weight gain and insulin resistance, with sugary drinks and processed foods as known culprits.

Sedentary lifestyles and a lack of exercise can also foster obesity and insulin resistance, making physical inactivity a significant risk factor.

Genetics also play a role, with a family history of diabetes increasing one's risk, especially for type 2 diabetes. Age is another risk contributor, particularly in individuals over the age of 45. Gestational diabetes during pregnancy increases the likelihood of type 2 diabetes later in life. High blood pressure, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), sleep disorders



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