WESTERN CONNECTICUT HEALTH NETWORK
DANBURY HOSPITAL • NEW MILFORD HOSPITAL

Patient Education Sheet

What is Type 1 Diabetes?

What is type 1 diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes is a disease in which the body no longer has the ability to produce the hormone insulin. This results in blood sugar (glucose) levels being higher than normal. Insulin must be replaced so that the body can process foods correctly and maintain near normal blood sugar levels.

What causes type 1 diabetes?

The exact cause of type 1 diabetes is still not clear. In some individuals with certain genes, an illness or viral infection can trigger the body's own immune system to destroy the special cells in the pancreas where insulin is made. While type 1 diabetes is most often diagnosed in childhood, it can occur well into adulthood.

What are the symptoms of type 1 diabetes?

Common symptoms of type 1 diabetes may include:

- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Increased hunger
- Unexplained weight loss
- Dry, itchy skin
- Cuts or sores that do not heal
- Feeling tired
- Abdominal pain*
- Nausea, vomiting*
- Fruity odor to breath*
- Blurred vision

(*Can indicate diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA), which requires immediate medical attention)

What is diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA)?

Diabetic ketoacidosis is a severe life-threatening condition that requires immediate medical attention.

The body requires glucose for energy. When the body cannot use glucose for energy due to a lack of insulin, the body breaks down fat for energy instead. When fat is broken down, the body makes chemicals called ketones that appear in the blood and urine. High levels of ketones make the blood more acidic, which is called ketoacidosis. When diabetes is the cause of the ketoacidosis, it is called diabetic ketoacidosis.

How is type 1 diabetes diagnosed?

The diagnosis of type 1 diabetes is made by your physician. Your physician will order a blood test to measure the glucose in your blood. The diagnosis is made if:

- You have symptoms of diabetes as outlined above
- You have a non-fasting blood sugar of more than 200 on more than one occasion, or fasting blood sugar more than 126 on more than one occasion.

How can I control my blood sugar if I have type 1 diabetes?

Controlling blood glucose involves three tools:

1. Medication
2. Good food choices
3. Physical activity

Daily use of a glucometer, or blood glucose testing machine, may also be recommended to test your blood sugar levels. Your healthcare team can help you develop and individualize these tools to achieve good blood glucose control.

What medication is used to treat type 1 diabetes?

Insulin is the only medication currently available for treatment of type 1 diabetes. Your physician will prescribe a type and amount of insulin based on blood sugar levels, lifestyle and food preferences. It is not unusual for insulin doses to be changes over time in order to achieve good blood sugar control.

Notes/Additional Information:

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Source:
American Diabetes Association @ www.diabetes.org
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists @ www.aace.com

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