

# Diabetes and Work

Kate Walker – Diabetes and You

## Key Points:

- There are currently 9.6 million people in the UK at risk of diabetes, with 3.2 million diagnosed and 100,000 undiagnosed.
- The cost to the NHS of treatment is currently around £10bn per annum.
- It used to be an age-related disease but now affects even primary school children.
- There is no definitive cause but stress is known to raise cortisol levels in the body. Cortisol and insulin do not work well together.
- When testing for diabetes the scale is from 1-7. A reading of 5 is considered normal, 6.4-6.9 indicates pre-diabetes and 7 results in a positive diagnosis requiring medical intervention. The finger prick test looks at how much sugar is in the blood at that moment. A more thorough test is carried out by the GP and then repeated three months later.
- Diabetes is, put simply, a sugar intolerance. It is, however, a serious and progressive disease and, as time goes by, requires more and more medication and carries a greater risk of complications (eg amputation).
- The body normally produces insulin to stabilise blood sugar levels in response to an intake of sugar.
- Type 1 diabetes is when insulin is no longer produced naturally and so has to be taken intravenously on a daily basis.
- Type 2 diabetes can be managed by low-level oral medication, a change of lifestyle and diet (become more active and reduce sugar intake/eat protein first) but it can affect people without them knowing. They could even have had it for 10 years before diagnosis, by which time the effects are irreversible. People often present at health appointments with other conditions, such as a heart problem, and diabetes is only diagnosed following further investigations.
- A 'hypo' (or 'black out') is experienced when blood sugar crashes down to the lower end of the scale. In this instance the blood sugar levels need to be raised very quickly – dextrose tablets or Lucozade will have a faster reaction than a chocolate bar, which also contains fat.
- Those who do not properly control their diabetes, through lifestyle and medication, can become a danger to themselves and others, especially when driving or operating machinery in the workplace. Diabetic drivers are required to be tested two hours before a journey and thereafter every two hours. Regular 'hypos' have to be reported to the DVLA and will result in a driving ban.