

Researchers call for dietary changes to prevent diabetes epidemic

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University of Otago researchers say that helping people with pre-diabetes and diabetes to follow a healthier diet will significantly improve their blood sugar levels, and they are calling on smaller portion sizes to be offered at cafés and eateries to support this cause.

Thursday this week is World Diabetes Day and to reinforce their point, the researchers are specifically visiting a café in Port Chalmers, Coffee Dot, which specialises in smaller portion sizes such as for slices.

Dr Kirsten Coppell, Professor Jim Mann and colleagues from the University's Edgar National Centre for Diabetes and Obesity Research have found that following a better diet, people with pre-[diabetes](#) are much less likely to go on to develop diabetes, and people who already have diabetes will have better control of their disease, preventing the onset and progression of complications.

"Diabetes is a common chronic disease with significant morbidity, mortality and cost. Seven per cent of New Zealand's adult population aged 15 years and over has diabetes," says Dr Coppell.

"Over one-quarter have [pre-diabetes](#) and are at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The numbers with pre-diabetes, on top of an already-high national diabetes rate, should be of major concern to New Zealanders."

Diabetes education and prevention is the focus of World Diabetes Day.

"Better diabetes control and prevention of diabetes is possible through sustained sensible dietary habits. Rather than focusing on a strict diet, smaller meals and reducing the amount of unhealthy components in the diet is effective," she adds.

The effect of reducing [portion sizes](#) and dietary changes (on top of medication) as an important and effective strategy has recently been the focus of research at the Edgar Centre, in the Lifestyle Over and Above Drugs in Diabetes (LOADD) study.

Rather than focusing on a strict diet, advice in the study was tailored to match each individual's socio-economic and cultural circumstances. It involved elements such as encouraging smaller meals, reducing unhealthy components in their diets while eating more fruit and vegetables.

"However, making and sustaining such lifestyle changes can be difficult for many people. Having specialist health professionals who can assess individual circumstances and provide regular advice and encouragement, as well as supportive family members, appears to be a key factor to succeeding in this."

Accordingly, the research's ultimate goal is to develop an appropriate programme, involving such experts, which could be put in place to improve the health of the hundreds of thousands of people in New Zealand living with [type 2 diabetes](#), as well as those with pre diabetes, she says.

Provided by University of Otago

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