

Busting the myths about type 2 diabetes

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Credit: Darren Lewis/public domain

When it comes to misunderstood medical conditions in Australia, type 2 diabetes is hard to beat.

Despite more than one million Australians having type 2 [diabetes](#), and around 280 new cases diagnosed every day, many people struggle to separate fact from myth.

Deakin University professor of behavioural and social research in diabetes Jane Speight said National Diabetes Week, which begins Sunday 12 July, is a great time to raise awareness about the realities of

living with diabetes.

"Type 2 diabetes is fast becoming Australia's number one burden of disease, yet there continues to be a lack of awareness among people, both with and without diabetes, about the condition," said Professor Speight, who is also the Foundation Director of The Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes.

"Misconceptions can impact on how people manage their condition and how they feel about it. It is important that people with diabetes and those around them realise it is a serious condition, and it can be challenging to manage it well. But there is plenty of support available if they need it."

Professor Speight busts some of the most common myths about type 2 diabetes:

MYTH: People with type 2 diabetes are to blame for their condition and bring it on themselves

FACT: No-one knows exactly what causes a particular individual's diabetes. We know that some risk factors are modifiable: people can lower their risk for type 2 diabetes by losing weight, increasing activity, healthy eating, lowering blood pressure and not smoking. However, other risk factors can't be changed, such as family history, age, ethnic background. Rather than blaming and shaming, and dwelling on what could have been done to prevent it, it is better to focus attention on what people can do now to manage their diabetes

MYTH: Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness, heart attack, kidney disease and amputations

FACT: Poorly managed diabetes can cause these complications but well-managed diabetes is the leading cause of nothing. Complications are not

inevitable; they can be prevented (and sometimes reversed) by maintaining optimal [blood glucose](#) levels and attending regular health check-ups

MYTH: Diabetes is only serious if someone takes insulin

FACT: All types of diabetes are serious and all types can lead to complications if they are not managed well. Insulin is just one form of medication used to manage the condition. The most important thing is that blood [glucose levels](#) are kept in the target range – it doesn't matter whether you do this with diet/lifestyle, with tablets or with insulin

MYTH: Using insulin means I have failed to manage my type 2 diabetes

FACT: Many people feel this way and often delay using insulin because they want more time to do better with their management. However, if it's time to start using insulin, this is because it's the best way to manage your [blood glucose levels](#) and not because of anything you have, or have not done. So, it's best to get on and start using it, as insulin is a very effective medication for bringing blood glucose within the target range to prevent complications

MYTH: People with diabetes should be able to take it in their stride

FACT: Living with diabetes is tough because managing it is a 24/7 activity. So, emotional reactions are a normal part of the journey. Many people report that they worry about the future and possible complications, and that they feel guilt and anxiety when they go off track with their [diabetes management](#). Moderate-to-severe depression is experienced by around one in three people with type 2 diabetes who use insulin and one in four who do not use [insulin](#). So, you are not alone. If you feel this way, seek help from your health professional or Diabetes Australia

Professor Speight said it is just as important for people without diabetes to be aware of the facts of the condition.

"Most people these days know someone who has [type 2 diabetes](#)," Professor Speight said. "We can all support our family and friends who have diabetes by encouraging them to self-manage their diabetes as best they can; to set realistic blood glucose targets and not view lapses as a sign of failure; to take their medications as recommended; and to seek out information and support services if things are becoming too frustrating or distressing," Professor Speight said.

Provided by Deakin University

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