

KZN Health HOD Dr SM Zungu urges the public to get tested for Diabetes

NON-Communicable Diseases such as Diabetes have reached epidemic proportions, yet they could be significantly reduced, with millions of lives saved through the reduction of risk factors, early detection and timely treatment.

This is according to head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health Dr Sibongile Zungu on the eve of World Diabetes Day, which will be observed internationally on Friday, 14 November 2014. Dr Zungu has urged members of the public to get into the habit of undergoing regular health examination.

"I would like to advise fellow South Africans to go to their nearest clinic and get a medical examination, so that they can know where they stand on Diabetes and on their health status in general. A medical examination is something that should be done at least once a year. Early detection of diseases is always better, cheaper and has a higher cure or management success rate."

According to South African Survey 2012, a book by the South African Institute for Race Relations, deaths due to Diabetes (mellitus) rose by 21% between 2004 and 2009. It is believed that a large number of South Africans with Diabetes remain undiagnosed.

According to Dr Zungu, preventing and managing lifestyle diseases, as well as promoting health and wellness, has never been more critical - especially with Diabetes contributing to the quadruple burden of Disease facing South Africa (HIV and AIDS and TB; High Maternal and Child Mortality; Non-Communicable Diseases and; Violence and Injuries).

Leading healthy lifestyles characterized by regular physical exercise, a balanced diet and no smoking or drinking would result in a drastic reduction in the number of people affected by Diabetes, cancer, heart disease and stroke and other Non-Communicable Diseases, Dr Zungu said.

"To become a healthy nation, South Africans need to make informed decisions about what they eat, whether or not they consume alcohol or should smoke and their sexual behaviour, among other factors," Dr Zungu said.

Dr Zungu said that although there is no cure for Diabetes, the management and control of blood sugar is very important as it prevents or reduces the risk of developing the complications of the disease. Abnormal high blood sugar levels (hyperglycemia), can cause kidney, eye, heart, blood vessel, and other diseases.

As the world observes World Diabetes Day on 14 November 2014, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health remains committed to empowering citizens by creating awareness about the dangers of diabetes and how it can be avoided and/or managed.



KZN Health HoD Dr Sibongile Zungu has encouraged members of the public to know their Diabetes status and undergo regular health examination.

Photo: Themba Mngomezulu/KZN Department of Health

Facts About Diabetes

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes (often called sugar diabetes) is a condition where a person has high blood sugar (glucose) level in the body. You develop diabetes when your body doesn't produce enough insulin. Without insulin your body cannot get the energy it needs from your food. Normally, a gland called the pancreas makes insulin which carries the sugar in the blood into the cells. In diabetes, the pancreas fails to supply enough insulin, or the insulin doesn't work properly.

There are two major types of diabetes: Type I, commonly called juvenile diabetes, and Type II, commonly called adult on-set diabetes. Both have similar symptoms but very different causes. Type I diabetes, usually diagnosed in childhood, is a disease whereby the body's own immune system attacks and kills the cells in the pancreas which produce insulin, leaving a person's body without insulin, and unable to regulate its blood sugar levels.

Type II diabetes is a disease that results when the body's cells become resistant to insulin. In Type II diabetes, unlike in Type I, insulin is still produced by the body; it just isn't used appropriately.

Risk factors for Diabetes include:

Age, obesity, genetics, physical inactivity, impaired glucose tolerance. The symptoms are constant thirst, increased hunger, urinating more than usual, numbness/tingling in fingertips and toes, tiredness, unexplained weight loss, blurred vision / visual disturbance, skin infection due to slow healing wounds and constant tiredness.

Unfortunately, there is no cure for diabetes, but with careful monitoring and commitment, diabetics can avoid complications and enjoy a long, productive life. It is especially important to control weight, blood cholesterol and blood pressure, to do regular exercise, and to avoid smoking.

Dr Zungu has advised those already living with diabetes as follows:

- Attain and maintain a healthy body weight;

- Eat small, regular meals, including snacks and do not skip any meals;
- Include plenty of fibre rich carbohydrates such as whole wheat products, dry beans, vegetables and fruit;
- Give preference to unrefined carbohydrates and include at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables in your diet every day;
- Limit fat intake, especially saturated fats (animal fats) and remove all visible fat from meat (skin off chicken) before cooking;
- Use healthier cooking methods such as steaming, baking in the oven, microwaving, boiling, braai over the fire – instead of deep frying in oil or adding fat;
- Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day. Do regular physical exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes at least 3 times per week. Any exercise program should be initiated with the permission of a doctor.

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health