

## HEALTHCARE MATTERS

Written by  
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# Can type two diabetes be 'cured'?

This month **Idai Makaya** discusses type two diabetes and the recent advances in the management and prevention of the condition. Gaining an understanding of type two diabetes and how it may be prevented – or controlled – is important for all of us (and not just for those currently afflicted by the condition). The information below should explain why.



For the majority, weight control is among the best ways of preventing type two diabetes

**FOR** clarity, there is a much less common form of diabetes called "type one" diabetes, which often develops in quite young people (or even infants) and is thought to be linked to genetics and/or viral infection, causing the pancreas to stop producing insulin.

Type two diabetes is more commonly seen in older people (usually adults) and is an increasingly more common – and major – health condition, thought to be related to lifestyle factors.

Type two diabetes is characterised by the body failing to produce enough insulin hormone to control the levels of sugar absorbed in the bloodstream – and also involves the body becoming resistant to the normal effects of insulin.

The condition is linked to failure of the pancreas to produce insulin in sufficient quantities to keep blood sugar levels normal. This failure is often thought to result from the pancreas being "overworked" by producing high quantities of insulin required to keep blood glucose levels normal in people who are overweight due to bad diet and exercise practices.

The resultant high blood sugar levels can cause a number of health problems, which eventually lead to the possibility of developing any (or all of) the complaints listed below:

- Heart problems;

- Sight loss;
- Vascular problems (weak and/or blocked blood vessels affecting circulation);

- Strokes;
- Blood pressure problems;
- Sores;
- Limb amputations;
- Depression.

Diabetes is a serious disease and must be prevented (or treated if developed). To get further insight into the treatment and prevention of diabetes I consulted two leading experts in different fields of medicine which tie into the management of diabetes.

Dr Colin Johnston is a Consultant Physician and Endocrinologist at Hemel Hempstead and St Albans Hospitals and Mr Vigyan Jain is a Consultant General and Bariatric Surgeon at Luton and Dunstable Hospital. Both experts treat patients from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

I posed the following questions to Dr Johnston:

**Q. Do you think type two diabetes can be prevented and if so - how?**

A. For some people who get type two diabetes it may not be preventable but it can probably be postponed significantly – reducing the health risks. That's because there may be strong genetic factors at play which make prevention more difficult for those individuals – but not necessarily impossible.

For the majority, the best ways of preventing the condition are to control your weight and maintain a narrow waist, to exercise regularly, to eat a diet high in vegetables and fresh fruits, to avoid foods containing fast-releasing sugars (i.e. very sugary 'foods' like sweets, cakes, etc.) and instead to focus on foods with slow-releasing energy, called 'complex carbohydrates' (like brown rice, oatmeal and bran) and also to have regular health checks (diabetes shows few – if any - symptoms as it develops).

**Q. Is there any way of catching**

**diabetes in the early stages of its onset.**

A. The only way to detect diabetes is to have a blood test. Regular health checks with your GP will also help but, unfortunately, our healthcare system is not set up to detect diabetes early on and diagnosis often occurs by chance discovery of anomalies in blood tests (tests often carried out for reasons unrelated to diabetes).

**Q. What are the best ways of treating type two diabetes, in your view - and which are the most effective of those treatments? Can type two diabetes actually be cured?**

A. As I previously alluded to, prevention is the most important weapon in the fight against diabetes. We all need to educate ourselves about the condition to prevent ourselves – and, perhaps more importantly, our children – from developing diabetes.

Many of the cases I see of diabetes relate to poor dietary and lifestyle habits in young people – who may not have been taught the necessary health and lifestyle skills from a young age to prevent them developing risky diet and health-related practices.

For patients with diabetes, doctors and nurses commonly treat the condition through a combination of education, diet, exercise, lifestyle modifications, oral medicines (tablets) and insulin injections – based on individual needs but weight loss with reduced food intake and exercise is the key.

Regarding 'curing' diabetes – it's still regarded as an incurable (but preventable) disease, in most cases. However, an important development in the treatment of diabetes has been surgery – specifically Bariatric Surgery (often called "weight loss surgery").

Certain weight loss surgery procedures appear to have a profound impact on type two diabetes – sometimes reversing the condition completely (for some patients).

**I thought the aspect of surgical treatment of diabetes was an**

**intriguing one. I asked surgical expert Vigyan Jain to expand further on the role of Bariatric surgery in diabetes treatment.**

**Q. Where does the surgical option apply and what sorts of outcomes have you experienced with your diabetic patients?**

A. There are a number of different surgical options for weight loss and the type of surgery which has the biggest impact on diabetes is Gastric Bypass Surgery.

This – and any other type of 'Bypass' surgery (such as Bilio Pancreatic diversion or Duodenal Switch surgery) – is effective in virtually 'curing' type two diabetes. It is particularly effective if the diabetes has been diagnosed for less than 10 years. If somebody is overweight (with a Body Mass Index above 35) and has diabetes, then surgery is certainly to be considered as an option to treat both diabetes and obesity.

Gastric Bypass Surgery is the safest of all bypass operations and has stood the test of time. Relying on the 'key-hole technique', it eliminates the many disadvantages of open surgery and has a very short hospital stay.

To summarise, Dr Johnston says: "The issue with type two diabetes is, as you say, insulin deficiency – but also insulin resistance, mainly due to obesity. If we can achieve weight loss and improve insulin sensitivity then – at least in the short term – pancreatic function is often sufficient to maintain normal blood glucose levels. That is what we are seeing with all types of weight loss surgery.

At the moment we cannot think of it as a cure (as the pancreatic dysfunction is likely to be progressive), it's more of a remission – but one that could have major health benefits."

*If you are affected by any of the issues raised in this article, or you would like to contact Dr Colin Johnston or Mr Vigyan Jain – please call the Spire Harpenden Private Hospital on 0800 585 112 or visit: [www.spirehealthcare.com/harpenden](http://www.spirehealthcare.com/harpenden)*

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Exercise and lifestyle modifications are often used as treatments