

North South Inter-Parliamentary Association



Second meeting

Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus

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Key Points

- Type 2 diabetes is a devastating, chronic disease which affects up to 90% of all people with diabetes. The chronic nature of the disease requires self-management by the patient and good medical support.
- Complications of Type 2 diabetes include heart disease, stroke, blindness, limb amputation and kidney failure to name but a few. These complications result in significant human, social and economic costs. The burden of the disease and its complications takes up considerable resources – accounting for approximately 10% of the healthcare budget.
- Evidence shows that Type 2 diabetes can, in some circumstances, be prevented or delayed. However, the disease frequently lacks any symptoms and can manifest for several years before clinical detection.
- Northern Ireland and Ireland do not have a national diabetes register in place to quantify exactly how many people are suffering from Type 2 diabetes. Estimates from Northern Ireland suggest that 75,000 people - almost **4%** of the population have diabetes (this includes people with both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes). This figure does not include the estimated 10,000 who remain undiagnosed and are unaware that they have the disease.
- In the Republic, estimates suggest that in 2010, 135,000 people were living with diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes) - almost **9%** of the population. This figure includes undiagnosed cases.
- The number of people affected by Type 2 diabetes is projected to rise dramatically in the next ten years. Increasing age, obesity and sedentary lifestyles are all contributing factors to the rising numbers of people with the disease.
- Whilst no cure for Type 2 diabetes currently exists, maintaining a healthy weight, eating a balanced diet and increasing physical activity can help to reduce complications and also prevent the onset of Type 2 diabetes.
- Policy in both jurisdictions emphasises education and awareness about healthy lifestyle choices, early detection and prevention of diabetes, as well as the promotion of integrated care models for diabetes patients - provided close to where they live.
- Very few cross-border initiatives specifically in relation to Type 2 diabetes care have taken place, and further work in this area could be explored.

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes, affecting around 90% of all people with diabetes.¹ It is a serious lifelong condition which causes blood sugar levels to become too high. In particular, Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body is unable to produce enough insulin to function properly, or when cells in the body do not react to insulin (insulin resistance). Most of the food we eat is broken down into glucose - the main source of fuel in the body. For glucose to get into the body's cells, insulin must be present. In people with Type 2 diabetes, glucose builds up in the bloodstream and the body cannot make efficient use of its main source of fuel.

This form of diabetes is distinguished from Type 1 diabetes which occurs most frequently in children and is characterised by a lack of insulin.

2. Complications and risk factors

Type 2 diabetes is associated with long-term complications that affect almost every part of the human body. If left untreated, it can lead to serious macro and micro vascular complications; cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, nerve and eye disease, diabetic coma, foot problems as well as premature mortality (figure 1).² It is also suggested that life expectancy can be reduced by up to 10 years for a person with Type 2 diabetes.³

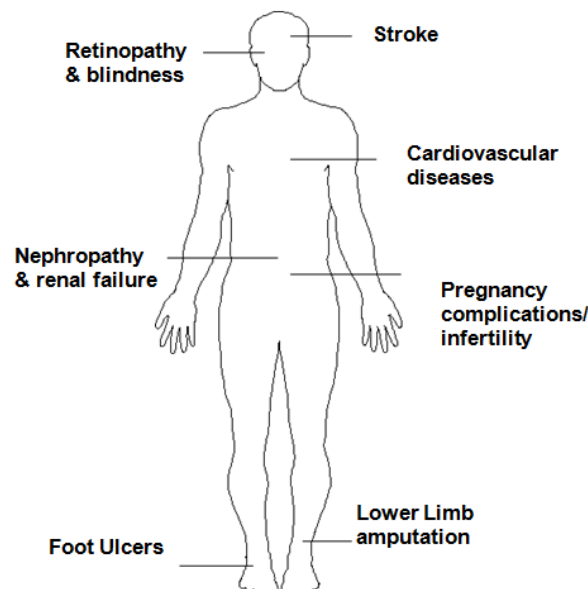


Figure 1. Complications associated with Type 2 diabetes

¹ World Health Organisation: Diabetes.

² International Diabetes Federation: Complications of diabetes.

³ Diabetes.co.uk: Diabetes Life Expectancy.

However, the disease frequently lacks symptoms and can manifest up to several years before clinical detection, thus making it difficult to diagnose. A key problem is that by the time symptoms appear, significant complications and co-existing morbidities may have already developed.⁴

Type 2 diabetes is strongly genetic in origin, but lifestyle and environmental factors - for example, excess weight, inactivity, high blood pressure, smoking, alcohol and poor diet are also known to increase predisposition to the disease. The disease also falls disproportionately on older adults, minority ethnic groups and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, people can develop Type 2 diabetes at any age, even during childhood. Indeed, poor diet and a lack of exercise are thought to be the main contributing factors to the increasing number of younger adults developing Type 2 diabetes.

3. Prevalence, prevention and management

The global incidence of Type 2 diabetes is rising rapidly as a consequence of increasing age, obesity and sedentary lifestyles. At present, Type 2 diabetes affects around **8.5%** of the world's population.⁵ Prevalence is escalating to such an extent that Type 2 diabetes has reached epidemic proportions.⁶

No cure for Type 2 diabetes currently exists, therefore the condition has to be managed.⁷ Yet many of the long-term complications associated with diabetes can be avoided with early diagnosis and good treatment regimens. It is estimated that up to 80% of cases of Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed through weight loss and increased physical activity.⁸

When a person is diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, treatment aims to keep the level of blood glucose, blood pressure and blood lipids (such as cholesterol) within recommended targets. This helps to control symptoms and to minimise health complications. Educating patients is vital as they assume substantial responsibility for managing their condition through healthy lifestyle choices and regular exercise. However, as time progresses, adequate blood sugar levels may be more difficult to maintain and some patients may require medication and / or insulin injections. As complications affect many parts of the body, care is usually provided by a variety of health care specialists; therefore integrated care pathways are also important.⁹

⁴ International Diabetes Federation; Types of diabetes.

⁵ Diabetes.co.uk. Diabetes prevalence.

⁶ International Diabetes Federation: Diabetes epidemic out of control.

⁷ International Diabetes Federation: Management of diabetes.

⁸ World Health Organization: Preventing chronic diseases: A vital investment, 2005.

⁹ World Health Organization: Diabetes self-management

