



Work Smart Live Smart

Diabetes In The Workplace

**By
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What is Diabetes?

Insulin is a hormone that helps the body use blood sugar for energy. Diabetes occurs when blood sugar rises above normal levels because the pancreas is either unable to produce insulin, or the body is unable to effectively use the insulin the pancreas manufactures.

According to the Canadian Diabetes Association, more than 2 million Canadians have diabetes. Considered an epidemic, diabetes is on the rise and is expected to affect 3 million Canadians by 2010. This is due to a number of factors including rising obesity rates and sedentary lifestyles.

There are three main types of diabetes:

Type 1

- Represents approximately 20% of people who have diabetes
- Occurs when the pancreas is unable to produce insulin
- Usually occurs in children and adolescents.

Type 2

- Represents approximately 80% of people who have diabetes
- Occurs mostly in adults, although an increasing number of children are at risk because they are overweight
- Develops when the body is unable to utilize the insulin the pancreas produces
- Eighty percent (80%) of people with Type 2 diabetes are overweight at time of diagnosis.

Gestational Diabetes

- Occurs during pregnancy and is typically a temporary condition.

If untreated or not managed effectively, diabetes can lead to a number of complications including eye, heart and kidney disease as well as nerve damage. Diabetes and its complications are reported to cost the Canadian healthcare system \$13.2 billion a year, and this figure is expected to reach \$15.6 billion by 2020.

Type 2 diabetes may be prevented or delayed through weight loss, healthy eating and increased exercise. Stress may have a negative impact on blood sugar control and people with diabetes as well as healthcare professionals are advised to monitor its effect.

Diabetes And Workplace Programs

A number of programs and tools are available to organizations interested in diabetes control and prevention strategies:

- The Canadian Diabetes Association (CDA) and Health Canada are encouraging employers to increase their understanding of diabetes and health-promotion principles through the Healthy Workplace Initiative. Although the resources and tools featured on this site are designed for CDA employees to facilitate the delivery of the Healthy Workplace Initiative, they provide useful insight for businesses interested in the 'how to' of diabetes prevention in the workplace. Details can be found at www.alderweb.com/website/dev_centre/cda/site/index.html.
- The National Diabetes Program, National Institutes of Health offers many resources and tools to the business community. In particular, a report entitled '*Making a Difference: The Business Community Takes On Diabetes*' is available in PDF format on this site. This report provides useful information on the human and economic impact of diabetes and gives suggestions on how businesses can help employees with diabetes achieve optimal control of their blood sugar. This report can be found at www.ndep.nih.gov/resources/business.htm
- diabetes@work.org is an online diabetes and health resource kit that assists businesses in assessing the impact of diabetes in the workplace. It also provides tools for employers to assist their employees manage their diabetes and take steps toward reducing complications.

- The National Quality Institute in partnership with Health Canada has developed a broad-based approach to health and wellness in the workplace. This site provides resources and tools to assist businesses in setting goals and managing their wellness programs. For more details go to www.nqi.ca/HealthyWorkplace/products.aspx.

The workplace is increasingly a target for diabetes prevention because people spend more time at work than anywhere else. Business leaders can play a key role in preventing and controlling diabetes thereby decreasing the economic burden of this rising health threat.

Louise Huneault BSN, MEd is a nurse, former diabetes educator and chef. Her company, Break An Egg (www.breakanegg.ca) specializes in the strategic development and implementation of programs that focus on wellness and healthy eating.

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