

Healthwatch City of London Patient Panel on Managing Diabetes with Diabetes UK

On Thursday, 26 November, we held an informative session with Diabetes UK on diabetes awareness, including the management, risk factors, and available resources that you can access. We were joined by Charlotte Burford, Communities and Volunteering Manager, who highlighted the role of Diabetes UK and provided information on diabetes.

Overview of diabetes

The types of diabetes

Type 1 diabetes: This type occurs when the body's immune system attacks insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. It is typically diagnosed in childhood or adolescence and requires lifelong insulin therapy.

Type 2 diabetes: More common, Type 2 is linked to lifestyle factors such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, and genetics. It can often be managed with lifestyle changes and medication, but may eventually require insulin.

Gestational diabetes: A temporary condition that occurs during pregnancy, often due to overweight or age. Risk is higher if the mother has previously had a large baby. Women who develop gestational diabetes are at greater risk of developing Type 2 diabetes later in life.

Challenges in Managing Diabetes

Managing diabetes can be complex, particularly for individuals balancing other responsibilities, such as family life and work.

Risk Factors for Diabetes

- **Type 1 Diabetes:** Genetic factors (family history) are the primary risk factor.
- **Type 2 Diabetes:** Lifestyle factors such as obesity, lack of exercise, and poor diet increase the risk. Age and family history also play significant roles.
- **Gestational Diabetes:** Women are more likely to develop gestational diabetes if they are overweight, over the age of 25, or have a history of delivering a large baby. Family history is not a direct risk factor for gestational diabetes.

Diabetes and the Cost of Living

Charlotte highlighted the impact of the **cost of living crisis** on diabetes risk and management. With rising food prices, people are more likely to choose cheaper, less healthy food options. This can exacerbate the risk of developing diabetes, particularly when nutritious options are too expensive for many families. It was highlighted that sugary and processed foods are often more affordable and accessible, even though they contribute to health issues.

Managing Diabetes with limited resources

To counteract these barriers, Diabetes UK offers various support resources:

Online Learning Zone: An educational hub tailored to individuals with diabetes, offering courses and resources based on their type of diabetes and lifestyle. It includes culturally specific content and options in multiple languages.

Support Groups: There is a support group located in Hammersmith and Fulham, which provide in-person and online meetings to offer peer support and advice.

Fundraising & Volunteering: There are opportunities to fundraise or volunteer for Diabetes UK, such as participating in the Million Step Challenge or hosting local events like bake sales or donation collections.

Lobbying for change

Diabetes UK is also actively involved in lobbying for legislative change to support healthier lifestyles. Currently, they advocate for the expansion of the sugar tax to include items like sweets, chocolates, and high-sugar breakfast cereals. They are also pushing for more public education on healthy eating and how it can prevent or manage diabetes.

Hypoglycemia (Low Blood Sugar)

A common issue for individuals with diabetes, **hypoglycemia (hypo)** occurs when blood glucose levels drop too low. It often happens when there is a mismatch between insulin or medication doses and food intake, especially if someone misses a meal or exercises too much. Managing insulin doses carefully and monitoring blood sugar levels is crucial to prevent hypos, but they can still occur in daily life due to unpredictable factors like stress, illness, or irregular eating patterns.

Overall, diabetes is a widespread condition with increasing prevalence, particularly in light of lifestyle factors and the cost of living crisis. Managing diabetes can be difficult, especially for those balancing multiple responsibilities, but the resources and support networks available today are essential in helping individuals live well with the condition.

The community support, education, and advocacy for diabetes prevention and management are crucial for improving the lives of people living with the condition.

It's essential to have access to the right resources, whether through peer support groups, health professionals, or educational tools, and to feel empowered to manage diabetes as a part of daily life.

To access resources from Diabetes UK, including information on the health issue and how you can support the charity, visit their website here: <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/>

For more information on our Patient Panels please visit our events page, <https://www.healthwatchcityoflondon.org.uk/events>