

# DIABETES AND THE BENEFITS OF A MEDITERRANEAN DIET

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**Diabetes is a condition that causes a person's blood sugar to become too high and can be a risk factor for various complications if not treated properly. It is common for the elderly to present with pre-diabetes or type 2 diabetes. This can be well controlled by diet and support from those surrounding them.**

## **There are two main types of diabetes**

### **Type 1**

Often this is genetic and affects around 8% of the population. The pancreas is an organ that produces insulin. Insulin is a hormone that carries glucose (or sugar) from the blood into the cells to be used as energy.

Type 1 diabetes means that the body's immune system has attacked its own pancreatic cells

preventing them from producing insulin. Therefore, someone with type 1 diabetes is insulin dependent and will need to inject themselves with insulin daily to control their blood sugar, allowing glucose from food to be used as energy in the cells.

## Type 2

This type affects 90% of people with diabetes. Type 2 is typically caused by too much glucose from food and drinks entering the body over sustained periods of time.

The pancreas releases insulin every time we eat. If our meals are high in sugars (processed foods high in refined carbohydrates, breads, pastry, chocolate, pasta, white potato and sugary drinks, including diet sodas) then the pancreas must work harder to release more insulin to keep up with demand.

This can result in either the pancreas becoming over-worked and eventually stopping to produce enough insulin to keep up with demand, or the cells stopping responding to the insulin wanting to bring the glucose into the cells to be used for energy.

## Mediterranean diet

The Mediterranean way of eating has been well studied in recent years and has shown to be the most effective for overall well-being and helping to control Type 2 diabetes.

The main principles being:

- Eat natural, unprocessed foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and nuts
- Eat only small amounts of dairy
- Make olive oil your primary source of dietary fat – cold pressed virgin olive oil!
- Reduce the consumption of red meat (monthly)
- Eat low to moderate amounts of fish (weekly)
- Drink a moderate amount of wine (up to one to two glasses per day for men and up to one glass per day for women)

See: [www.mediterraneandiet.org.uk](http://www.mediterraneandiet.org.uk)

The benefits are vast. Helping with cardiovascular health, cognitive function, reduced hip fractures, reducing blood pressure, cholesterol and of course helping to prevent or to control Type 2 diabetes.

## Low sugar / carbohydrates

It is still possible to enjoy foods whilst remaining mindful about blood sugar spikes. Adding protein to meals and snacks and making sure there is plenty of fibre in the diet are two ways of buffering glucose releasing into the blood stream.

Desserts are often an area of confusion. There is no need for somebody to miss out if portion sizes are controlled; a little piece of something sweet is often ok after a meal and experimenting with low carb desserts can also help.

This time of year whipped cream and strawberries is the perfect diabetic-friendly dessert!

***Our Nellsar Homes can easily support anyone who wants to be more mindful about their continued health and maintaining a healthy weight and I am always on hand to sit and have some one-to-one time with any resident who wishes to discuss meal planning.***