



The Farmhouse – support for farming families affected by diabetes

The Farmhouse Fact Sheet 1

Type 2 diabetes in farming communities



Type 2 Diabetes is one of the most common chronic conditions in Australia. Type 2 Diabetes is now more common among those aged 45 years and over than it was before and is also increasingly developing at younger ages, including in children. Outcomes for health and wellbeing for people affected by type 2 diabetes are significantly worse for people in rural and particularly remote, areas. People in remote and very remote areas have, respectively, two and three times the rate of hospitalisation, and two and four times the rate of death from diabetes as people living in major cities.

A large part of the difference in health outcomes between city dwellers and rural and remote Australians, can be attributed to obesity, tobacco and alcohol use. These three are key risk factors in type 2 diabetes. Lack of physical activity is also a key factor. The lack of access to resources, support and follow up when diabetes is diagnosed, contribute to these problematic outcomes.

Diabetes is complex and the road from farm to health centre is long!

Compared with major cities, rural and remote communities have larger proportions of people who are in high risk groups, such as people who smoke, drink larger amounts of alcohol, are overweight or obese and inactive - and there is an increasing prevalence of type 2 diabetes with increasing remoteness. Diabetes management is also more challenging in rural and remote communities where access to health care is not as good and complications of diabetes are more likely to occur. Utilising local support where available and getting creative with options such as online information, medical consultations and counselling, can increase your ability to manage your diabetes, health and wellbeing.





Symptoms

Many people know about the classic signs of diabetes such as needing to urinate more often, drinking lots of water and being fatigued. These are often present in type 1 diabetes, where there can be very high blood glucose levels, very quickly. In type 2 diabetes, these things can occur, but often there are *no* symptoms. It is estimated that about half of those who have type 2 diabetes have not yet been diagnosed. Even if symptoms are present, they are often not recognised or people think they are due to other reasons such as being busy or ‘getting older’. In many cases blood glucose levels can be very high by the time symptoms are noticed and medical treatment is sought. Some people with type 2 diabetes are only diagnosed when a complication occurs, such as a foot problem, or heart attack.



Common symptoms include:

- Being more thirsty than usual
- Passing more urine
- Feeling tired and lethargic
- Slow-healing wounds
- Itching and skin infections
- Blurred vision
- Mood swings.



Risk factors for type 2 diabetes

While there is no single cause of type 2 diabetes, there are well-known risk factors.

Those most at risk of developing type 2 diabetes include:

- People with pre-diabetes.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 35 and over.
- People aged 35 and over who are Pacific Islanders, Maori, Asian (including the Indian subcontinent, or of Chinese origin) Middle Eastern, North African or Southern European.
- People aged 45 and over who are obese or overweight, have high blood pressure or have a first-degree relative with type 2 diabetes.
- All people with cardiovascular disease such as heart attack, angina, stroke, or narrowed blood vessels.
- Women with polycystic ovarian syndrome who are overweight.
- Women who have had gestational diabetes.
- People aged 55 or over.
- People with a first degree relative with type 2 diabetes
- People taking certain antipsychotic medications

Lifestyle factors that increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes include:

- Being overweight or obese, especially around the waist.
- Low levels of physical activity.
- Unhealthy eating habits, such as regularly choosing high fat, high sugar, high salt or low fibre foods.
- Cigarette smoking.

If you are at a higher risk it's important you have a laboratory blood glucose test (not using a portable blood glucose meter) performed by a doctor to check if you have pre diabetes or diabetes, on an annual basis. This test is preferably done after fasting which may be tricky if you are driving from the farm. In this case it is suggested you book a few days away and visit the doctor so you can stay overnight and fast the next morning. You can take the opportunity to have a range of health screening done, such as cholesterol and prostate health for men. It is also very important not to wait for symptoms to develop as these may not appear until the blood glucose is quite high. If picked up in the pre diabetes stages there are changes you can make to prevent or delay the progression to type 2 diabetes. Even a 5% weight loss can have huge impact on management and prevention.