

## Diabetes Life Expectancy

If you manage your diabetes carefully, your life expectancy won't be reduced

After diabetes diagnosis, many type 1 and type 2 diabetics worry about their life expectancy.

Death is never a pleasant subject but it's human nature to want to know 'how long can I expect to live'.

There is no hard and fast answer to the question of 'how long can I expect to live' as a number of factors influence one's life expectancy.

How soon diabetes was diagnosed, the progress of diabetic complications and whether one has other existing conditions will all contribute to one's life expectancy - regardless of whether the person in question has type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

### **How long can people with diabetes expect to live?**

Diabetes UK estimates in its report, *Diabetes in the UK 2010: Key Statistics on Diabetes*<sup>[5]</sup>, that the life expectancy of someone with type 2 diabetes is likely to be reduced, as a result of the condition, by up to 10 years.

People with type 1 diabetes have traditionally lived shorter lives, with life expectancy having been quoted as being reduced by over 20 years.

However, improvement in diabetes care in recent decades indicates that people with type 1 diabetes are now living significantly longer.

Results of a 30 year study by the University of Pittsburgh, published in 2012, noted that people with type 1 diabetes born after 1965 had a life expectancy of 69 years.<sup>[76]</sup>

### **How does diabetic life expectancy compare with people in general?**

The Office for National Statistics estimates life expectancy amongst new births to be:

- **77 years** for males
- **81 years** for females.

Amongst those who are currently 65 years old, the average man can expect to live until **83 years** old and the average woman to live until 85 years old.

### **What causes a shorter life expectancy in diabetics?**

Higher blood sugars over a period of time allow diabetic complications to set in, such as:

- Diabetic retinopathy
- Kidney disease
- Cardiovascular disease (heart disease)

Higher blood sugars can often be accompanied by associated conditions such as

- Higher blood pressure
- High cholesterol

Both help to contribute to poor circulation and further the damage to organs such as the heart, kidneys, eyes and nerves in particular.

In some cases, short term complications such as hypoglycemia and diabetic ketoacidosis can also be fatal.

### **Transcript**

Statistically diabetes results in lower life expectancy than people without diabetes. However, it is not all doom and gloom and there are steps you can take which can help to increase your likelihood of living longer.

The bad news is that average life expectancy for people with diabetes is shorter than people without diabetes. Diabetes UK's annual report on diabetes in the UK states:

- People with type 1 diabetes, on average, have shorter life expectancy by about 20 years
- People with type 2 diabetes, on average, have shorter life expectancy by about 10 years

That sounds very depressing but there are some factors that also need to be considered. The statistics are based on historical figures from times when people with type 1 diabetes lacked access to blood glucose monitoring. With the much better access to self monitoring these days, life expectancy of current generations may well improve. These days, people with type 2 diabetes are getting diagnosed

earlier in the development of diabetes which, with good diabetes control, may also help to improve long term life expectancy.

The following factors can be a significant help towards keeping healthy and living longer:

- Attaining good blood glucose control
- Keeping blood pressure and cholesterol levels within target levels
- Maintaining a healthy body weight

Your health team should check your progress on each of these at least once each year.

There are other guidelines provided by the NHS that contribute to living a longer and healthier life, including:

- Eating a balanced diet with a high proportion of vegetables
- Including physical activity into each day
- Not smoking
- Keeping any alcohol intake low

### **What can I do as a diabetic to help increase my life expectancy?**

Maintaining good blood glucose control is a key way to prolong the length of your life.

Keeping blood sugar levels within the recommended blood glucose level ranges will help to offset the likelihood of the complications and therefore increase life expectancy.

It is highly recommended to enjoy a healthy lifestyle, of a well balanced diet and regular activity, in order to help keep blood pressure and cholesterol at healthy levels and promote good blood circulation.

### **Why has life expectancy been lower for people with type 1 diabetes?**

People with type 1 diabetes will, in the majority of cases, develop diabetes at a younger age than those with type 2 diabetes, therefore they will usually spend a longer period of their life living with the condition.

However, there is good news - people with type 1 diabetes have been known to live for as long as over 85 years with the condition. As noted above, recent studies

into life expectancy are showing significant improvement in life expectancy rates for people with type 1 diabetes born later in the 20th century.

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- Diabetic for over 75 years
- Living with diabetes for 85 years

### **Is type 2 diabetes less serious than type 1 diabetes?**

Generally type 2 diabetes develops more slowly than type 1 diabetes.

As a result, some people can be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes (and some other diabetes types) years after they first developed the condition. In some cases diabetes may only be diagnosed after noticing the signs of diabetic complications which is a serious position.

It is not fair to judge which condition is more serious, all types of diabetes have a serious impact on people's health and it is a difficult condition which takes a lot of time, persistence and care to manage.

### **Dr Shahjada Selim**

Assistant Professor

Endocrinology Department

Bangobandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Dhaka

Chamber:

### **COMFORT DOCTOR'S CHAMBER**

165-166, Green Road, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mobile: 01731 956033, 01552 468377, 01919000022