

# DIABETES FACT SHEETS

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



A healthy sexual relationship can be an important part of life. Most people with diabetes don't experience difficulties with their sex lives, although diabetes can contribute to sexual problems for some. When things go wrong it can be difficult to accept that there may be a problem. It is important to know that support is available. It is also important that you get the right information. If your diabetes team hasn't discussed sexual health yet and you have questions or concerns, please ask. You might feel embarrassed but they won't.

### The Menstrual Cycle - Periods - Waiwhero

Diabetes can affect reproductive health. For example, some people living with diabetes may find they get their period later than many of their friends who don't have diabetes.

Glucose levels may be affected by different stages of the menstrual cycle. This can be different from person to person and from month to month. It is common to have difficulty managing glucose levels for the week prior to your period. Changes in the levels of hormones called oestrogen and progesterone can cause glucose levels to be higher than normal. You may find that your insulin does not work as well and that you need to give much larger doses of insulin during this time. Some people have noticed that they can have more episodes of hypoglycaemia (low glucose levels). It may be possible to have a different insulin plan for different weeks of the month. This can be developed with your diabetes team.

### Top Tips:

Keeping a diary of your glucose readings may help you find patterns in your glucose levels and help you better manage your diabetes.

Talk to your diabetes team if you are having trouble keeping your glucose levels within target.

### Erectile dysfunction (ED)

This is when a person cannot keep an erection long enough to have satisfactory sexual intercourse. Fertility is not affected and ejaculation may or may not be affected.

Erectile dysfunction can be a problem that occurs occasionally in a person's life. This can be caused by being tired, stressed, depressed, or drinking too much alcohol. Some medications may also cause ED. It is important to always tell your doctor about any medications you may be taking for other conditions.

Reduced blood flow and nerve damage to the penis can lead to ED. By keeping glucose levels in target range can help to prevent ED. There are also a number of ways to treat ED. It is important to discuss all the options with your doctor to decide what's best for you.

### Contraception – Rongoā ārai hapūtanga – Everyone's Responsibility

This is an important conversation for anyone living with diabetes. [Click here](#) for information from Family Planning.

Most women who have diabetes have perfectly healthy pregnancies and healthy babies. This isn't to say that it's an easy experience. It is very important to achieve and maintain excellent glucose control prior to and during pregnancy. This requires a lot of work and dedication on your part. If you are thinking about having a baby, or think you are pregnant, then it is important that you speak to your diabetes care team as soon as possible.

If you are sexually active, it is important to use effective contraception, up until the time you want to become pregnant.

*As kaitiaki (carers/guardians) of diabetes related services, it is a collective responsibility to establish an environment that facilitates a pathway for people with diabetes to navigate te ao mate huka - the world of diabetes<sup>1</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> Te Kaiwhakahaere Māori te Roopu mate huka Debbie Rawiri - Te Whatu Ora Waitaha Canterbury

## Long Acting Reversible Contraception

This is the most reliable form of contraception available.

- IUD (hormonal (Mirena or Jaydess) and copper) – Works for 3 – 8 years.
- Jadelle contraceptive implant – Works for up to 5 years.

## Hormonal Contraception

These can cause a slight change in glucose levels initially, which can be managed by adjusting your insulin doses.

- Progestogen-only contraceptive pill – Suitable to use when you have diabetes. It is a good idea to schedule your pill with other routine medication. Needs to be taken at the same time every day.
- Combined oral contraceptive pill – Suitable for those with diabetes who do not have complications. Needs to be taken every day.
- Depo Provera injection – Suitable for those with diabetes who do not have additional complications. Needs to be given every 12 weeks.

## Emergency Contraception

- Emergency contraceptive pill – suitable for people with diabetes in emergencies. Must be taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex.
- Copper IUD - If it is longer than 72 hours since unprotected sex, please see a health professional as an emergency IUD may be suitable.

## Barrier Contraception

It is always important to consider barrier contraception as an option for sexual health and protection against infection.

- Condoms – Suitable for all people with diabetes, however less reliable for preventing pregnancy than other types of contraception. To prevent infections, you should use condoms every time you have sex. These can (and should) be used at the same time as using other forms of contraception.

## Summary

It is important to discuss your contraception choice with a health care professional. You should consider both your contraception and sexual health needs. All methods of contraception have advantages and disadvantages. It is up to you to choose. You will know which one will work best for you and meet your needs. It is also important to have regular sexual health checks. Your diabetes team are here to support you and talk through your options.