

DISCOVER THE
BRILLIANCE
OF **GEMS**



TRUST GEMS TO GIVE
YOUR HEALTH A HEAD START

DIABETES CARE BENEFITS WITHIN REACH



What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition that occurs when your blood sugar is too high. Blood sugar, also known as blood glucose, is your main source of energy, and comes from the food you eat.

Insulin, which is a hormone produced by your pancreas, controls the amount of glucose in the blood. If your pancreas doesn't produce insulin, or doesn't produce enough insulin for the body to work properly, the levels of glucose in the blood will be too high. Over time, this could lead to diabetes.

While diabetes has no cure, you can take steps to prevent it, and to manage the condition if you have it, so that you can stay healthy.

There are three types of diabetes: Type 1, Type 2 and gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy). In this brochure, we will focus on Type 2 diabetes. It's the most common type, where the pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin for the body to work properly.

How does diabetes affect my health?

If you don't manage diabetes properly, you are at risk of:

- Blindness
- Amputations
- Kidney failure
- Brain damage
- Heart attack and stroke
- Erectile dysfunction
- Early death

How can I manage Diabetes?

Control glucose levels

The most important thing you can do is control your glucose levels. These are tested in two ways:



Finger-prick test: This is done every day – you can do it on your own. It shows your glucose level at the moment.



HbA1c test: This is done every 3 months. It checks how well your treatment is going.

Medicine and Insulin

If you're using Insulin medication to manage your glucose levels, make sure you know the answers to these questions:

- What are the types of Insulin and how do you store them safely?
- Do you know how to give the correct dose?
- Do you know how to recognise, prevent and treat low blood glucose reactions (hypoglycaemia)?
- Do you know the importance of injecting in different places on your body?
- Do you know how to interpret home glucose testing and change your Insulin dose if needed?
- Do you know the effect of exercise on Insulin requirements?
- Do you know what to do in an emergency?
- Do you understand the importance of wearing a Medic Alert bracelet?
- Do you know how to take care when driving?

Aside from Insulin, diabetes pills can also help to control glucose levels by assisting the body to use its own insulin more effectively.

It's important to take your diabetes pills as prescribed and do not stop taking them unless told so by your doctor. If you do not take your diabetes pills as prescribed, your condition may worsen and increase the risk for complications.





Maintain normal cholesterol and blood-pressure levels

Eating healthily, exercising, reducing and managing stress and sometimes using medication can help to lower your blood pressure and cholesterol.



Stop smoking

Smoking is bad for you, especially when you have a chronic condition such as diabetes. If you're struggling to quit, don't be afraid to reach out for help.



Eat better

The right foods can improve your health. If you're not sure which foods are right for you, speak to a dietician and ask for an eating plan.



Exercise

Just 30 minutes a day, three to five times a week, can help you to control glucose levels, and can also protect your heart.



Drink less alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can be dangerous for your health. If you don't want to cut it out completely, stick to one small glass of wine or one can of beer a day.



Cut back on aspirin

Most people with an increased risk of heart attacks or strokes take a low dose of aspirin every day. Ask your doctor if you need to do this.



Have your eyes checked at least once a year

Diabetes can affect your vision, so it's important to go for regular eye tests.

Have your feet checked at least once a year

Take good care of your feet

- Examine your feet every day.
- See your doctor immediately if you have a foot injury.
- Wash your feet daily in lukewarm (not hot) water, and dry them carefully, especially between the toes.
- Use a soft towel and pat dry – don't rub.
- Never walk without shoes, even on the beach.
- Never cut calluses yourself.



Have your kidneys checked every year

Diabetes can cause kidney failure, so a urine test is important. The test can also check for high ketone levels and infections.

Preventative measures for Type 2 diabetes

When it comes to type 2 diabetes (the most common type of diabetes) early detection and prevention is very important. GEMS offers a Glucose screening test that can be done at a doctor's room or pharmacy once a year for beneficiaries who are 20 years of age and older.

A few simple changes in your lifestyle can also help you avoid the serious health complications of diabetes in the future.

Here are 4 prevention tips:

1. Get physically active

Exercise can help you:

- Lose weight
- Lower your blood sugar
- Boost your sensitivity to Insulin — which helps keep your blood sugar within a normal range

2. Increase fiber in your diet

Fiber may help you:

- Improve your blood sugar control
- Lower your risk of heart disease
- Promote weight loss by helping you feel full

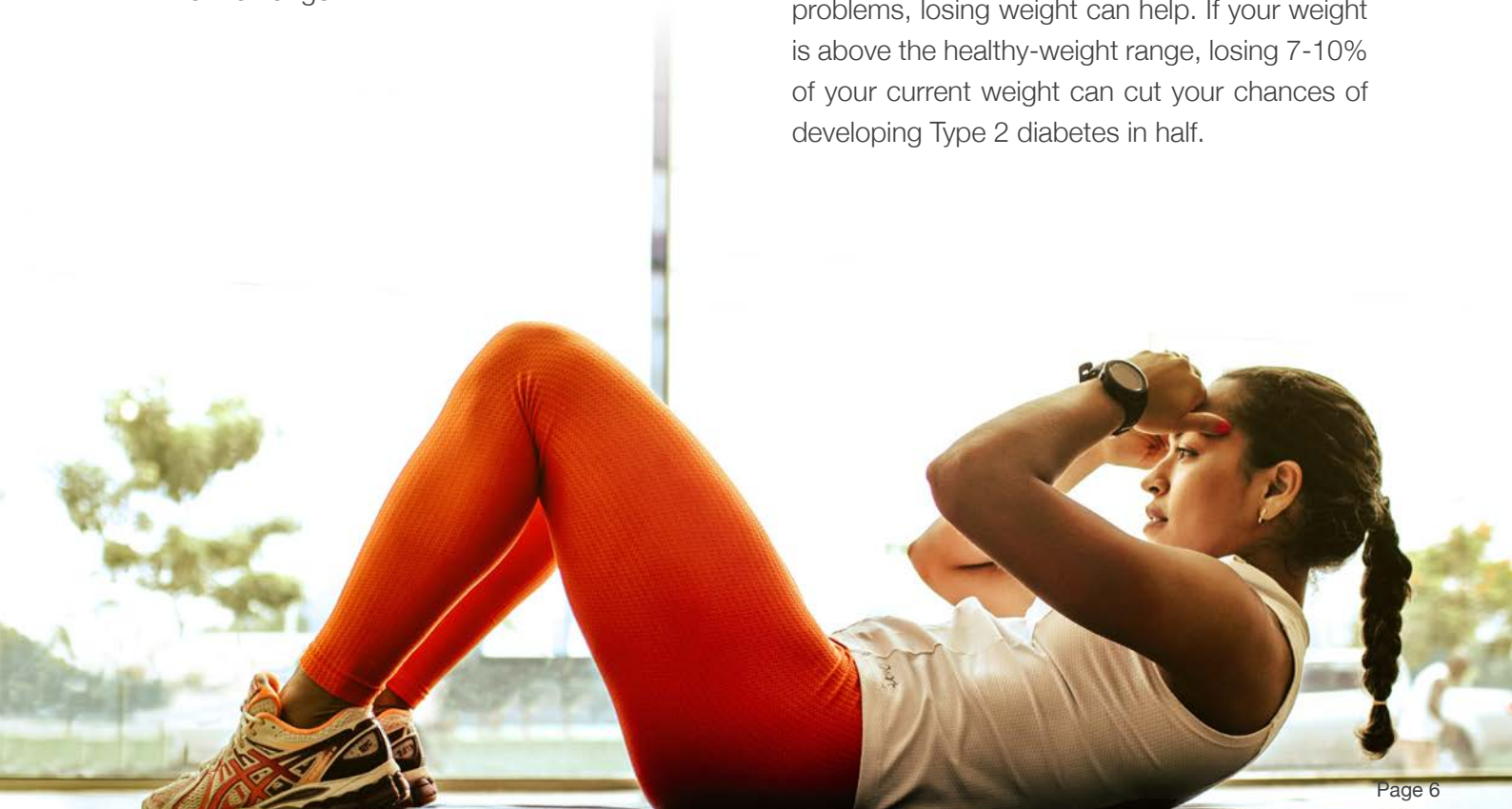
Foods high in fiber include fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains and nuts.

3. Eat whole grains

Try to make at least half your grains whole grains. Many foods made from whole grains come ready to eat, including various breads, pasta products and cereals. Look for the word “whole” on the package and among the first few items in the ingredient list.

4. Lose extra weight

For those who are overweight or have weight problems, losing weight can help. If your weight is above the healthy-weight range, losing 7-10% of your current weight can cut your chances of developing Type 2 diabetes in half.



Preventative care and screening benefit

Preventative health screening is one of the most important healthcare strategies to facilitate early diagnosis and treatment of disease as well as to improve quality of life and prevent premature death.

GEMS offers comprehensive screening and preventative care benefits to its members. Please consult your Scheme rules or call **0860 004 367** to verify your benefit.



How does diabetes affect pregnant women?

Pregnant diabetics, or diabetic women who are planning to get pregnant, need special care. To prevent birth defects, miscarriages and stillbirths, they need to strictly maintain their glucose levels.

Your treatment may be different when you're pregnant, so you need to speak to your doctor immediately once the pregnancy has been confirmed.

What do I do in an emergency?

When you start treatment, your glucose levels may become too high or too low. This can cause complications. It's important for you and your friends and family to recognise warning signs, so that you can be helped.

A Medic Alert bracelet tells others how to help you.

What are Prescribed Minimum Benefits?

Prescribed Minimum Benefits (PMBs) are a set of defined benefits stipulated by the Medical Schemes Act. The aim of PMBs is to provide minimum health services, including certain tests, to everyone who needs them, irrespective of which medical scheme they belong to.

Using PMBs to manage diabetes

Diabetes is a PMB condition, so it's important that you register the diagnosis with your medical aid, in order to receive the proper treatment and care to manage your condition.

How will GEMS help me with diabetes?

GEMS may contact you to ask about your diabetes. We will use your healthcare information to decide how best to support you.

GEMS will assist with any information you need about your diabetes and related health matters. The aim is for you to feel as healthy as a person without diabetes.

Visit www.gems.gov.za for more information or call us on 0860 004 367

Contact details



GEMS member call centre: 0860 004 367
GEMS provider call centre: 0860 436 777



Email
enquiries@gems.gov.za



Web
www.gems.gov.za



GEMS, Private Bag X782, Cape Town, 8000

Make use of the multi-function **GEMS** Member App to interact with the Scheme at home or on the go to make your life easier.

Use the QR Code to download the GEMS Member App



DISCOVER THE
BRILLIANCE
OF **GEMS**

The digital membership card is available on the GEMS Member App and is convenient for members and their beneficiaries. Make use of the multi-function GEMS Member App to interact with the Scheme at home or on the go to make your life easier. Use the QR Code to download the GEMS Member App.



The information in the brochure is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking medical treatment because of something you have read on or accessed through this information.