



# “I HAVE DIABETES AND I’M ONLY 25!”



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ASK THE PERSON STANDING NEXT TO YOU IF THEY’VE BEEN TESTED FOR DIABETES AND THEY MIGHT GIVE YOU A STARE AND SAY NO! **VASENTA SELVANAYAGAM** DIGS DEEPER TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS ILLNESS THAT EVEN YOUNGSTERS SHOULD BE WARY OF.

We all hear the danger diabetes poses over and over again, more so after Malaysia was reported to top the list of patients in the ASEAN region for 2015 (according to a report in *The Star*). But how aware are we and serious about this? Let’s take you on a step-by-step course to find out more.

## STEP 1 COMMON EXCUSES

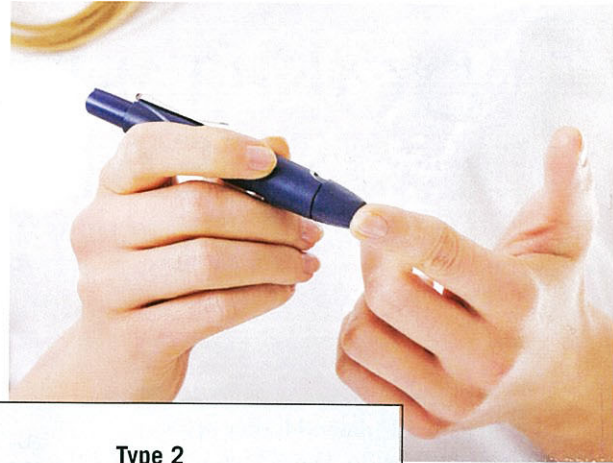
Dr Pavandeep Singh Dhilon, Chief Medical Officer at Columbia Asia Hospital, says the prevalence of diabetes in Malaysia has increased by 31 per cent over the last five years and most were contributed by an increase of undiagnosed cases. Ten to 15 per cent of sufferers were between the ages of 25 and 35. Out of curiosity, we decided to ask a few working adults if they’d ever taken a test to check their blood glucose levels and these were the answers we got:

- “I love to eat sweet things but no one in my family has diabetes so I don’t have to be scared.”
- “I’m sure I’m free from diabetes as I’m young. Older people are usually more prone to getting it.”
- “I Googled the symptoms and no, I don’t have any.”
- “I grew up in a family that taught me how to consume very little sugar. Quite certain I’m free from it, plus I’m thin.”
- “It (the test) costs a lot, and although I have a sweet tooth, I work out often. Very sure I’m free from diabetes.”

# STEP 2

## UNDERSTANDING DIABETES

With technology at our fingertips, we take it for granted that we can find most of the information we need online, but in this case, we would rather not take the risk as we learn that the symptoms of diabetes vary from person to person. As Dr Pavandeep explains, while most people are not aware they suffer from it, some are also borderline (pre-diabetes) cases who will eventually suffer from diabetes type 2.



Type	Type 1	Type 2
Cause	It happens when the pancreas produces little or no insulin	The pancreas produces enough insulin but cell receptors don't turn the insulin into glucose. Eventually this causes sugar to build up in your blood
Percentage of people who fall under this category	10 per cent	90 per cent
Symptoms	No early symptoms. Patients usually have onset signs (cuts that heal slowly, excessively thirsty, blurred vision, etc.)	No early symptoms as heredity and obesity are common causes
Prevention	Can't be prevented	Can be prevented



# STEP 3

## HOW TO PLAY SAFE

Just saying no to that cup of iced chocolate or cream-cheese muffin, however tempting, doesn't quite cut it. What Dr Pavandeep suggests is a balanced lifestyle to reduce your risks of getting diabetes. "Start by maintaining a healthy weight. Make sure that your BMI is less than 23kg/m<sup>2</sup>. Cut down your intake of rice and noodles and instead, opt for more fruits and vegetables. Another tip is to cut down on sugary food and drinks. Sweet food and drinks are an integral part of the Malaysian diet. But did you know that a can of soft drink has up to seven teaspoons of sugar? Substitute it with fruit juice that has no added sugar or just plain water. Lastly, spend at least 30 minutes a day, three times a week, exercising. This will help you lose weight and reduce your glucose level."

# STEP 4

## ACCEPTING THE TRUTH

The harsh truth is that there is no cure for diabetes. "The aim of a treatment for a diabetic patient is to prevent complications, which can affect the quality of life of the individual; patients should also do their best to maintain their blood sugar levels through their food intake, medication and exercise," says Dr Pavandeep. One of the worst-case scenarios that can happen when diabetes isn't managed well is when a patient becomes blind. "High levels of blood glucose will lead to blockages of the tiny blood vessels in the retina of the eye, cutting off the blood supply that nourishes it and leading to a condition known as diabetic retinopathy, which leads to blindness in the long run. However, if you've already been diagnosed with diabetes, work with your doctor and follow his advice to prevent this problem," he adds.