



*“You cannot buy your health, you must earn it through healthy living.”*

Joel Fuhrman

In this month's newsletter:

### Diabetes Awareness Week 2021:

Does nutrition affect your risk of getting type 2 diabetes?

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# Diabetes Awareness Week 2021: Does nutrition affect your risk of getting type 2 diabetes?

Put simply, the answer is yes. But we're going to delve a little deeper to see how many cases of type 2 diabetes could have been prevented as well as why your nutrition choices increase your risk.

## What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic disease that occurs either when the body does not produce enough insulin (type 1) or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces (type 2). Insulin is a hormone that regulates blood sugar, or glucose. We all need insulin to live as it does an essential job in allowing the glucose in our blood to enter our cells and fuel our bodies.

## Type 1 Diabetes

When you have type 1 diabetes, your body still breaks down the carbohydrates from food and drink and turns it into glucose, but when the glucose enters your bloodstream, there's no insulin to allow it into your body's cells leading to high blood sugar levels.

## Type 2 Diabetes

When you have type 2 diabetes, similarly to type 1, your body still breaks down the carbohydrates from food and drink and turns it into glucose. But here is the key difference; the pancreas releases insulin, but as your body cannot use this effectively your blood sugar levels keep rising, causing more insulin to be released. For some, this can eventually lead to the pancreas making less insulin resulting in even higher blood sugar levels.

**Hyperglycaemia**, or raised blood sugar, is a common effect of uncontrolled diabetes and over time leads to serious damage to many body parts including the eyes, heart, kidneys, and feet.

## The facts and figures

According to Diabetes UK, more than 4.6 million people in the UK have type 2 diabetes. This is equal to one in 14 people. There is also an estimated 12.3 million people at increased risk of type 2 diabetes in the UK, and obesity is the leading cause in most preventable cases.

While type 1 diabetes isn't preventable, three in 5 cases of type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed by making healthier choices.

The World Health Organisation states that adults with diabetes have a two-to three-fold increased risk of heart attacks and strokes and diabetes is the cause of 2.6% of global blindness, as well as being among the leading causes of kidney failure.

## What are the risk factors?

The main factors that increase your risk of type 2 diabetes is being overweight or obese. Storing fat mainly in your abdomen - rather than your hips and thighs - indicates a greater risk. If you do store fat around your abdomen it's important to remember these figures. Your risk of type 2 diabetes rises if:

- You're male with a waist circumference above 40 inches (101.6cm)
- You're female with a waist circumference above 35 inches (88.9cm)

Linking in closely with being overweight is inactivity. The less active you are, the greater your risk. Physical activity helps control your weight and uses up glucose as energy, making your cells more responsive to insulin.

Other risk factors include family history, race and ethnicity, high cholesterol ratio and age amongst others.

## Type 2 Diabetes and Obesity

The links between obesity and type 2 diabetes are firmly established and without the intervention of a healthy diet and appropriate exercise, obesity can quickly lead to type 2 diabetes. However, by quickly understanding whether you are at risk and taking action to make some changes, you can lower your risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and types of cancer.



## What about your diet?

Regularly consuming more calories than your body needs and eating a diet high in fat and cholesterol increases your risk and can also lead to obesity, the main risk factor.

According to the NHS, a 5% reduction in body weight followed up by regular moderate intensity exercise could reduce your type 2 diabetes risk by more than 50%.

### Choose carbs that are high in fibre

Refined carbohydrates, such as white bread, white rice and sugary breakfast cereals are linked with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. But wholegrain alternatives, such as brown rice, wholewheat pasta, wholegrain bread and oats are linked to a reduced risk.

Not only does eating more fibre reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes, but it is also associated with a lower risk of other serious conditions such as obesity, heart diseases and certain types of cancers.

Other healthy sources of carbohydrates include:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Pulses such as chickpeas, beans and lentils

### Reduce your red and processed meat intake

Regularly eating red and processed meats such as bacon, sausages, ham, pork, beef and lamb is often associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, as well as heart problems and certain cancers.

You should aim to get as much of your protein as possible from healthier, but just as tasty alternatives such as:

- Lean meats, such as chicken and turkey
- Eggs
- Fish
- Pulses such as chickpeas, beans and lentils
- Unsalted nuts
- Unsweetened yogurt and milk

### Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables

We've all been told from a young age that we should aim to consume a minimum of 5 portions of fruit and veg per day. But did you know that there are certain varieties that are specifically associated with a reduced diabetes risk? These include:

- Apples
- Grapes
- Berries
- Green leafy veg such as spinach, kale, watercress and rocket.

You can eat these fresh or frozen and should always try to find ways to fit these in to your diet - this could be by consuming them as snacks or as an extra portion of veg with your meals.

## Reduce your alcohol intake

Alcohol is high in calories and consuming a lot of it can make it difficult if you are trying to lose weight. Guidelines recommend drinking no more than 14 units per week, spread evenly over 3-4 days.

### Choose drinks without added sugar

It's fairly commonly known that there is a link between having full sugar fizzy drinks and energy drinks and an increased risk of type 2 diabetes.

When cutting out sugary drinks, try not to replace them with fruit juices or smoothies as these still contain a high amount of sugar. Try plain water, no-added sugar cordial, sugar-free tea or coffee as replacements.

With these healthy eating tips you should be able to switch up your diet and start introducing more healthy, tasty and nutritious meals that in turn, help you to reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes.

## How else can you prevent type 2 diabetes?

As outlined earlier in the article, there are some factors that we can't control such as our age and race, but healthy lifestyle choices can prevent type 2 diabetes, even if you have some uncontrollable risk factors.

The World Health Organisation suggests:

- Eat healthy foods: choose foods lower in fat and calories and higher in fiber. Focus on eating plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Get active: aim for 150 minutes or more a week of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity such as a such walk, cycling, running or swimming.
- Lose weight if needed: losing a modest amount of weight and keeping it off can delay the progression from prediabetes to type 2 diabetes. Losing 7%-10% of your body weight can reduce the risk of diabetes.
- Avoid long periods of inactivity: sitting still for long period can increase your risk of type 2 diabetes. Try to get up every 30 minutes and move around for a few minutes.

Did you know, at Healthy Performance, we carry out diabetes risk assessments in all of our onsite health assessment options as well as a full diabetic profile within our option 5 health assessment.

For more information, please get in touch here: <https://www.healthyperformance.co.uk/employee-health-checks/>



# How has men's health changed over time?

**Did you know that women have a longer life expectancy than men? Women are also more likely to visit their GP than men, and less likely to drink excessive amounts of alcohol. But why is there such a large health gap between males and females?**

## Life expectancy

Men have a lower life expectancy than women, even though there is no biological reason for there to be a difference. Men have a much higher suicide rate than women and are more likely to die from preventable diseases with research indicating that up to half of male cancer cases could be prevented by improving diet and lifestyle.

There have been two turning points in trends in life expectancy in England in the past decade. From 2011, increases in life expectancy slowed after decades of steady improvement and in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic caused a more significant turning point, causing a sharp fall in life expectancy not seen to this extent since World War II.

In the 19th century, males had a life expectancy just 2 years lesser than women (40.2 years vs 42.3 years) but in the early 20th century, the gender gap in life expectancy started to widen, peaking at 6.3 years (69.2 vs 75.5) by 1971. This was due to poor working conditions and smoking among men in contrast to improved life chances for women, for example, lower risk of dying in labour.

By 2019, life expectancy at birth in England reached 80 years for men and 83.7 years for women, narrowing the gender gap once again. Healthy life expectancy also increased over time,

but not at much as life expectancy – meaning more years are spent in poor health. An English male could expect to reach 79.8 years of age in 2017-19 but his average healthy life expectancy was only 63.2 years – i.e. he would have spent 16.6 of those years (21%) in 'not good' health.

During the same period, an English female could expect to live to 83.4 years, of which 19.9 years (24%) would have been spent in 'not good' health. So although females live an average of 3.6 years longer than males, 3.3 of those additional years is spent in poor health.

However, in 2020 we saw the gender gap widen once again to 4 years due to mortality rates from Covid-19 being higher in males than females.

Women are much more likely to visit their GP when ill as well as examine themselves for lumps and bumps. Whereas men are less likely to report the symptoms of disease or illness, resulting in their condition being likely to have worsened by the time they decide to seek diagnosis. As well as being less likely to seek medical help, deaths from occupational causes are far higher among men and coronary heart disease death rates are up to five times higher for men.

The underlying cause of this pattern of health inequality between genders lies in different exposure to risks, especially at work. These risks include working in occupations with a poorer safety record and 'lifestyle' issues such as men's diet and reluctance to talk about personal matters.

According to the Office for National Statistics, 'the reduction in the proportion of men smoking, along with the decline of heavy industry and the move away from physical labour and manufacturing industries towards the service sector are likely factors in why the gender health gap has narrowed in recent years'.

## Weight, diet and exercise

Every year, the NHS release a publication on the Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet in England.

Their most recent publication, covering April 2018 – December 2019 found that during this time frame, just 25% of men were eating the recommended 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day. In comparison, in 2007 27% of men were meeting these guidelines, up from 22% in 2001. So why have we seen a slight U-turn in the last decade?

This could be down to recent estimates suggesting that households in the bottom fifth of income distribution may need to spend 42% of their income, after housing costs, on food in order to follow the Public Health England's recommended diet, as reported [www.kingsfund.org.uk](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk).

The same NHS publication found that in 2018/19, 41% of men were overweight, with an additional 26% of males falling into the obese category. This totals 67% of men being of an unhealthy weight compared with 60% of women. The total proportion of adults who were obese was 28%.

In 2007, almost a quarter of adults (24% of both men and women) were obese, and 65% of men were of an unhealthy weight (overweight including obese) compared with 56% of women.

In 1993 the percentage of obese adults in England was just 9%, showing an increase of 19% in the years from 1993 to 2018.

Not only is this affecting our own quality of life but it can also have an impact on the children of obese or overweight parents with the 2018 study showing that 22% of children with obese fathers were also obese themselves.

## So how can we change this?

The study showed that overall, physical activity has increased among both men and women since 1997, with 40% of men and 28% of women meeting the recommended physical activity guidelines in 2006 (7-8% increase from 1997-2006). Since then, there has been a vast improvement in this area with 67% of adults being considered as active as per the government guidelines and men (70%) were more likely to be active than women (65%) in the 2018/19 publication.

## What does this mean?

All in all, the gender gap in life expectancy is steadily reducing and although men are more physically active than women, there is definitely room for improvement in other areas.

Take some time to assess your own behaviours and lifestyle choices and see where you could make some small, yet beneficial changes. As men are less likely to visit their GP when problems arise, you should also research into any potential risk factors for diseases that affect both genders but also those associated solely with men, such as prostate and testicular cancer. We have provided you with a number of resources below to get you started:

- [Men's health](#)
- [Blood sugar and diabetes](#)
- [Testicular cancer](#)
- [Sleep and stress](#)
- [Maintaining a healthy lifestyle](#)
- [Prostate cancer](#)
- [Alcohol](#)
- [Physical activity](#)



So, if there's anything that you take away from this article let it be that you make some healthier food choices, squeeze in a little extra physical activity, visit your GP rather than avoiding the problem and don't be afraid to speak out if you are struggling with your mental health.

**After all, each of the above tips could help you to live longer.**

## Sources:

<https://worksmart.org.uk/health-advice/illnesses-and-injuries/your-body/mens-health/what-are-key-health-differences-between>

<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/whats-happening-life-expectancy-england>

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet/england-2020>

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<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/what-are-health-inequalities>



## Fact of the month

The development of **Type 2 diabetes** is strongly linked to lifestyle, which means that many cases could be prevented.

## Tip of the month

**Don't be afraid to visit your GP. Get checked, stay healthy.**