

# Be mindful of weight and sugar



Dr Foo Siew Hui

By DR FOO SIEW HUI

Over the last few years, the prevalence of diabetes (diabetes and obesity) has increased exponentially. In 2015, diabetes; prediabetes; overweight/obesity cases (defined as people with a BMI of 25 and above) made up 13.4%; 8.8% and 47.7% of the population respectively.

However, cases rose in 2019 with diabetes at 18.3%; prediabetes at 23.6%, and overweight/obesity cases at 50.1% respectively.

"A common misconception of diabetes is that people think that they get the disease because of their genes," says Dr Foo Siew Hui, consultant endocrinologist at Subang Jaya Medical Centre.

This is an issue as Malaysians who have this mindset tend to write the disease off as simply one of the ailments of life and instead of acting, ignore the root of the issue completely.

Besides that, Dr Foo shares that people often think that if they do not have the symptoms, they do not have to go for any check-ups.

"Diabetes is a very asymptomatic disease, and, in most cases, you don't see the symptoms until it's too late."

In the past, it was a common belief that if you were diabetic, you are diabetic your whole life. However, that is not entirely true as Dr Foo explains that some people may develop diabetes because of excess body weight.

For such cases, the diabetes will go into remission when they are able to lose the excess body weight. However, Dr Foo says individuals of normal body weight who have been diabetic for the past 10 to 15 years and on insulin, cannot be cured.

## Taking precautions

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr Foo says those with diabetes represent an extra vulnerable group whereby when they do get infected, they are more likely to be symptomatic, need hospitalisation or develop serious complications.

"I had the chance to look at the preliminary mortality report from the Health Ministry and out of 121 Covid-19 deaths (as of 6 July 2020), almost 60% had diabetes. If you are someone who is struggling with diabetes, you need to avoid gaining weight by watching your calorie intake and output," Dr Foo advises.

Being aware of what

you eat is of utmost importance and she urges the public to avoid stocking up on refined foods and instead opt for fresh, healthy food and put in the additional effort to exercise indoors.

It is also important to properly manage stress during this pandemic. Several individuals resort to eating to cope with stress and Dr Foo asserts that this is a very unhealthy method of coping. "Find other outlets to deal with your stress, it can be through a physical activity you enjoy or simply seeking support from a friend."

## More serious than you think

"The pandemic is far from over, and if you belong to this vulnerable group, you need to learn how to protect yourself," expresses Dr Foo.

Besides the general measures that everyone must follow such as washing your hands and maintaining a one-meter distance; those with diabetes need to avoid gaining weight.

"The data from China has shown that if you have diabetes with poorly controlled blood sugar, you are seven times more likely to die. Similarly, someone who is obese is three times more likely to have a fatal outcome compared to those of normal weight."

Dr Foo urges those with diabetes to take medications as advised by their doctor and get the necessary vaccinations.

If you find yourself with symptoms or suspect that you have contracted Covid-19, Dr Foo recommends that you seek professional care as soon as possible.

"A lot of patients come after five days but by then, the disease has progressed, making it harder to recover, which results in a higher mortality rate," says Dr Foo.

She also advises those with diabetes who have Covid-19 to check their glucose levels four to seven times a day. She notes that doctors from other countries have reported that there have been cases of patients who are confirmed non-diabetic coming in with high sugar levels when infected with Covid-19.

"Covid-19 is still a very young disease and there is a lot we have yet to learn about it. So, people with diabetes and obesity need to take care of themselves and do what they can to ensure that they do not get infected."

For more information, call 03-5639 1212.

