Greater support needed for those diagnosed with diabetes - Media release

New research shows people diagnosed with type 2 diabetes are not receiving adequate support to optimise their diet in their first year of diagnosis.

Presented today at the Dietitians Australia National Conference, researchers uncovered that less than 7% of Australians with type 2 diabetes were able to consistently improve their diet quality in the year after their diagnosis.

Across 12 months, researchers from Griffith University undertook quarterly phone surveys with 225 people newly diagnosed with diabetes. Data collection finished just prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Regardless of socio-demographic factors, health status or health service usage, the mean diet quality score was considered average and remained stable for most participants across the study period.

"Improving diet quality – such as eating more fruits, vegetables, legumes, wholegrains and reducing ultra-processed foods – is key to managing type 2 diabetes," said Associate Professor Lauren Ball, researcher and Advanced Accredited Practising Dietitian.

"These dietary changes can help improve quality of life and reduce the risk of complications such as blindness, amputations and kidney disease. These findings highlight that we need better models of care to support our population."

While a Medicare Chronic Disease Management Plan allows Australians to access five subsidised appointments split across 14 health professionals each calendar year, this is insufficient for change.

“It’s likely that a person newly-diagnosed with diabetes would benefit from seeing a number of health professionals such as a diabetes educator, exercise physiologist and podiatrist. This means they may only have one or two subsidised appointments with a dietitian,” said Lauren.

“When you consider the number of times we eat in just one day, receiving a mere hour each year of nutrition support from a dietitian is not enough.”

This week is also National Diabetes Week, held from 11-17 July 2021, which looks to highlight the mental health burden experienced by people with type 2 diabetes.

Lauren says to help reduce the mental load of this condition, increasing support and optimising the delivery of care is vital.

“Diabetes doesn’t occur overnight, so changing decades-long food habits is challenging,” she said.

“Along with one-on-one support, better utilising group sessions, social media and optimising food intake for mental health are all areas worthy of further research to develop programs that are realistic and feasible in our current environment.”

For those seeking support for their diabetes management, Lauren shares this advice:

“Be sure to seek on-going support from an Accredited Practising Dietitian, who can help you navigate nutrition and make dietary changes that are sustainable for your lifestyle,” she said.

ENDS

Media enquiries

For media enquiries and interviews, contact our Media Officer on 0409 661 920.

Note to editors: Dietitians Australia is the leading voice of nutrition in Australia, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia.