



Diabetes dictionary

Definitions of some common diabetes terms

Whether you're using insulin for the first time, or have been using it for years, this simple glossary of terms explains some of the words and phrases you may come across.

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| Angina | Chest pain that results from a shortage of oxygen in the heart muscle. |
| Basal bolus | An insulin injection routine intended to copy normal insulin levels. A combination of a long-lasting insulin injection (basal) with several short-acting insulin injections at mealtimes (bolus). |
| Calibration/coding | Setting up a blood glucose meter to use a particular batch of test strips and ensure accurate results. Should be performed when opening a new box or pot of test strips. |
| Capillaries | The smallest blood vessels in the body. Found throughout the body, some are so small, they are the same diameter as a red blood cell. |
| Cardiovascular | Related to the heart and blood circulation. |
| Cataracts | An eye condition in which the lens becomes cloudy or opaque. Risk of developing cataracts increases with age. |
| Diabetic retinopathy | This is a disease that is caused by complications due to poor circulation of blood through the retina. People with diabetes commonly develop the disease over a long period of time. |
| Diastolic blood pressure | A blood pressure reading taken as the heart relaxes. It is the second figure in a blood pressure measurement. |
| Glaucoma | A problem associated with increased pressure within the eye. |

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| Glucose | A simple type of sugar that comes from the digestion of starchy foods (bread, rice, potatoes, chapatis, yams, plantain, etc), from sugar and sweet foods, and from the liver, which makes glucose. |
| Glycaemic Index (GI) | A way of classifying foods according to their effect on blood glucose levels. High GI foods (eg. a baked potato) raise blood glucose levels quickly, while low GI foods (eg. pasta) raise levels more slowly. |
| HDL cholesterol | ‘Good’ cholesterol which transports cholesterol from your cells to your liver. |
| Hyperglycaemia | Or ‘hyper’. High blood glucose levels. |
| Hypoglycaemia | Or ‘hypo’. Low blood glucose levels (under 4 mmol/L). |
| Insulin | A hormone produced by the pancreas. Insulin helps glucose in the blood enter the body’s cells, where it can be used as fuel by the body. |
| Ketoacidosis | A dangerous condition caused by high blood ketone levels. |
| Ketones | Poisonous chemicals which can be produced if cells do not have glucose to burn to generate energy. |
| LDL cholesterol | ‘Bad’ cholesterol which transports cholesterol from your liver to your cells. |
| Monounsaturated | A type of fat that can help decrease LDL cholesterol. |
| Neuropathy | A disease of the nervous system. |
| Retina | The layer at the back of your eye. It acts like camera film, ‘capturing’ images and sending signals to the brain where they are interpreted into the things you see. |
| Risk factor | Anything that increases your chance of developing a disease. |
| Slow acting carbohydrates | Carbohydrates which are digested slowly and release their energy slowly and steadily over a long period. |
| Systolic blood pressure | A blood pressure reading taken when the heart squeezes as it beats. It is the first figure in a blood pressure measurement. |
| Triglyceride | A source of stored energy. High blood levels of triglycerides increase your risk of heart disease. |