



**Wolverhampton
Diabetes Care**

The long term complications of Diabetes

People with diabetes should expect to remain fit and healthy and free of the long term complications of diabetes. These complications, when advanced, can cause serious health problems and a worsening of the quality of life. They are best avoided by taking effective preventative actions.

What are the long term complications?

Diabetes can complicate life in many ways but what is meant by this is the long term changes in the circulation that lead to damage to parts of the body. The parts affected include the eyes, kidneys, feet, heart and other circulation problems that can cause stroke or poor blood supply to the legs.

What causes these complications?

Many factors affect the circulation but most especially poor blood sugar control, a high blood pressure, a high level of cholesterol or fat in your blood stream and smoking. Being inactive and overweight makes matters worse. The older you are and the longer you have had diabetes increases the risk as well.

All of these factors come together to damage the lining of the blood vessels which thicken so that the blood can not properly flow through.

Some of these blood vessels are very small and are called "micro vascular". Damage here particularly affects the eyes, kidneys and nerves.

Larger blood vessels, "macro vascular" vessels, known as the arteries, can also become blocked as the damaged lining thickens up with calcium. You may hear of people saying, "the arteries are furred up". In such arteries, the blood flow is sluggish or blood clots may form. This leads to various heart problems such as angina, heart attack or heart failure. It can cause stroke. Poor circulation to the legs and feet can cause difficulty in walking, foot ulcers and is the biggest factor leading to foot or leg amputation.

How can these complications be avoided?

We know what can reduce the risk of these complications. Don't smoke. Keep good control of your diabetes – the long term HbA1c test should be less than 7%. Get your blood pressure effectively treated if high – the top number should be less than 140. You may need aspirin or cholesterol treatment. Stick to a healthy diet, try and keep active and don't let your weight get out of hand.

Have your regular check ups to be sure you are tested or screened for any complications so that action can be taken to stop matters getting worse. Many people have minor problems that can be dealt with early so they will not cause trouble in the long run.

Seeking advice and what care to expect

Ask your doctor and nurse about your risk of complications and about how to prevent them. You should expect full education and information about these complications and how to avoid them. You must be checked annually to ensure problems are not developing. You should expect to know what action needs to be taken if they are there. In certain circumstances, you should be sent to specialists if more complicated treatments are required.