Non-Communicable Diseases Watch

衞生防護中心
Centre for Health Protection
衞生署
Department of Health

November 2025

Addressing Diabetes:

Know More • Do More • Advance Workplace Wellness

Key Messages

- Diabetes mellitus (called 'diabetes' thereafter) is a common chronic disease. Among local adults aged 15–84, the Population Health Survey 2020-22 found that 8.5% had diabetes, in which 36.5% were unaware that they had the disease.
- Adopting a healthy lifestyle reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes. Individuals are encouraged to maintain an optimal body weight and waist circumference, have a balanced diet, be physically active, avoid smoking and refrain from alcohol use.
- Type 2 diabetes is often asymptomatic in its early stages. People can be living with the disease and not know it. For early detection and treatment of type 2 diabetes, adults aged 45 or above are recommended to have their blood glucose checked regularly. When obesity or other risk factors for diabetes are present, more frequent testing is recommended.
- Hong Kong residents aged 45 or above can join the Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme for relevant screening services.

Diabetes is a Disabling Disease

Diabetes significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases such as coronary heart disease and stroke, kidney failure, lower limb amputation, blindness,[1] non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and certain types of cancer such as colorectal cancer, liver cancer and female breast cancer[3]. When combined with obesity, studies show that they are additively associated with an increased risk of incident cardiovascular events[4, 5] and would increase mortality risk by seven-fold[6, 7]. While the global prevalence of diabetes rose from 7% in 1990 to 14% in 2022[8], adult obesity more than doubled during the same period[9]. This article presents the associations between diabetes and obesity, reports the prevalence of diabetes among the local population, and urges individuals to maintain an optimal body weight and waist circumference to reduce the risk of diabetes.

Reference values for blood glucose in defining prediabetes and diabetes	
Prediabetes	**It is characterised by blood sugar levels that exceed normal levels but are not high enough to be classified as diabetes** • **Fasting blood glucose (mmol/L) : 6.1–<7.0; or** • **2 hours after meal (mmol/L) : 7.8–11.0; or** • **Glycated haemoglobin (%) : 5.7–6.4**
Diabetes	**It is characterised by persistently elevated levels of blood glucose** • **Fasting blood glucose (mmol/L) : ≥7.0 ; or** • **2 hours after meal (mmol/L) : ≥11.1 ; or** • **Glycated haemoglobin (%) : ≥6.5**

Obesity and Diabetes are Intricately Linked

Obesity triggers type 2 Diabetes

- Fat cells would release pro-inflammatory cytokines and other molecules, triggering chronic inflammation in organs such as the pancreas, liver, and skeletal muscle[10, 11].
- The inflammatory response contributes to insulin resistance, diminished pancreatic cell function to secret insulin, increased hepatic glucose production and reduced glucose uptake in skeletal muscle, eventually leading to elevated blood glucose levels[10, 11].

Obesity is a key risk factor for type 2 diabetes

- A cohort study in the Chinese Mainland found that for every 1 unit (kilogram per square meter: kg/m^2) increase in body mass index among adults, the risk of developing type 2 diabetes rose by 23%[12].
- Individuals who accumulate excess fat in the abdominal cavity—a condition known as central obesity—face a greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those who store fat on the buttocks, hips and thighs[11]. A study involving over 26 800 adults aged 18 and above reported that normal-weight individuals with central obesity were about 2.4 times as likely to develop type 2 diabetes compared with normal-weight individuals without central obesity[13].

Asian Body Mass Index (BMI) Classification	
Underweight	**BMI <18.5**
Normal	**BMI 18.5 –<23.0**
Overweight	**BMI 23.0 –<25.0**
Obese	**BMI ≥25.0**

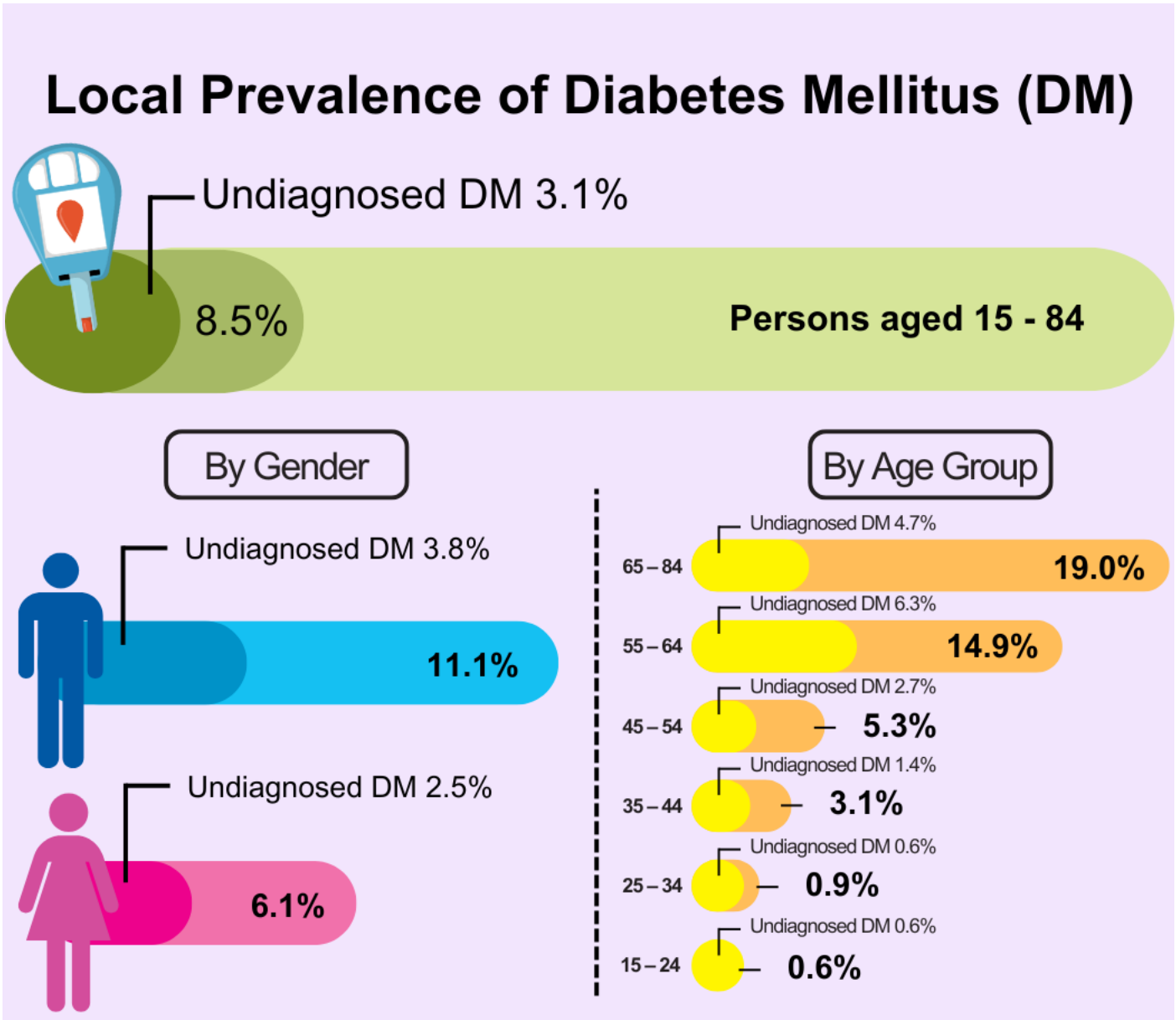
Obesity fuels the global rise in diabetes and related disease burden

- Between 1990 and 2021, annual deaths from type 2 diabetes due to high BMI increased from about 238 000 to more than 723 700[14].
- Measured in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs, i.e. the sum of life years lost due to ill health, disability and premature death), the total DALYs increased from about 10.4 million in 1990 to 39.3 million in 2021[14].

Diabetes is Common in Hong Kong, Yet Many Don't Know

The Population Health Survey (PHS) 2020-22 of the Department of Health confirmed diabetes through self-reporting of existing diagnosis and blood glucose testing. Results showed that 8.5% of community-dwelling persons aged 15–84 had diabetes, in which 36.5% were unaware that they had the disease. The proportions of indiagnosed cases (i.e. persons with no self-reported history of diabetes but raised blood glucose) were higher among males and persons aged 55–64[15].

For early detection and treatment of type 2 diabetes, adults aged 45 or above are recommended to have their blood glucose checked regularly. When obesity or other risk factors for diabetes are present, more frequent testing is recommended[16]. However, the PHS 2020-22 observed that about three-fifths (59.1%) of persons aged 45 or above had their blood glucose checked within 3 years[15].



Note: Undiagnosed DM — No self-reported history of DM but fasting plasma glucose ≥7.0 mmol/L or glycated haemoglobin (HbA1c) ≥6.5% by biochemical testing.
Source: Population Health Survey 2020-22.

Healthy Living Cuts Type 2 Diabetes Risk by 47%

Adoption of healthy lifestyles from an early age and maintaining an optimal body weight and waist circumference are key to preventing type 2 diabetes. A systematic review and meta-analyses of 7 randomised-controlled trials reported that lifestyle changes including improved diet and physical activity reduced the risk of type 2 diabetes by 47%[17]. Local men and women should aim for a BMI between 18.5 and 22.9[18, 19]. Men should keep their waist circumference below 90 cm, while women below 80 cm[19 20]. For people with diabetes and obesity, moderate weight loss of 3%–7% can improve blood glucose levels[1], while a reduction of 5%–8% could improve multiorgan insulin sensitivity[11]. For more information about healthy living, please visit Change for Health website of the DH at www.change4health.gov.hk.

Eat a balanced diet. While a diet rich in fruit and vegetables is associated with a reduced risk of diabetes and obesity, plant-based anti-oxidants and polyphenols can delay or prevent the onset of diabesity[21]. Adults are urged to eat at least 2 servings of fruit and 3 servings of vegetables per day. When packing lunch, make healthier food choices and choose more whole grains to increase dietary fibre intake. Choose an EatSmart Restaurant and look for "More Fruit and Vegetables" Dishes (i.e. either fruit or vegetables are the sole ingredients of the dish, or they occupy at least twice as much the amount of meat and its alternatives present in the dish) and "3 Less" Dishes (i.e. the dish has less fat or oil, salt and sugar) when dining out, organising gatherings or business lunches/dinners.

Be physical active and reduce sedentary behaviours. Physical activity can reduce adiposity including intra-abdominal fat, improve insulin sensitivity and enhance glucose uptake by muscles, which in turn help regulate blood glucose level and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes[21]. Adults should engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per day, such as walking to and from work, taking a walk during lunch break, stair-climbing, doing 5 minutes of on-the-spot stepping after every 45 minutes of sedentary work, organising team activities such as group walks or walking challenge. Also, Limit the amount of time spent being sedentary and replace sitting time with physical activity of any intensity including light intensity physical activity[22].

Do not smoke. Smoking significantly increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Tobacco smoke contains numerous harmful substances, such as nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide that impair the function and mass of pancreatic cells, affecting the production of insulin and regulation of glucose metabolism[23]. Quitting smoking lowers the risk of developing various chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes by 30%–40%[23] Thus, smokers should quit immediately. For free smoking cessation tools and services, please call the Quitline 1833 183 or visit the designated website www.livetobaccofree.hk.

Refrain from alcohol drinking. Chronic alcohol consumption can potentiate the development of diabetes through impairing insulin secretion by pancreatic cells[24]. Alcoholic beverages are extremely caloric. Each gram (g) of alcohol provides 7 kilocalories (kcal), slightly fewer that than fats, which provides 9 kcal. Too much alcohol can add extra calories to the diet, which can contribute to weight gain in some people[25]. Non-drinkers should not start drinking, while drinkers are urged to appraise their drinking habits, realise alcohol-related harm and appreciate the benefits of reducing and stopping alcohol consumption.

Work and health are closely related. For health tips on healthy eating, physical activity and mental well-being in the workplace, please visit the thematic website of "Joyful@Healthy Workplace" joyfulhealthyworkplace.hk/en

Type 2 diabetes is often asymptomatic in its early stages. People can be living with the disease and not know it. Since 2023, the Government has launched the Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme (CDCC Pilot Scheme), providing subsidised diabetes along with hypertension and hyperlipidaemia screening services in the private healthcare sector to Hong Kong residents aged 45 or above with no known medical history of diabetes or hypertension in order to achieve the chronic disease management objectives of "early prevention, early identification and early treatment". For more details, please visit the dedicated website of the CDCC Pilot Scheme: www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk/cdcc/en. Individuals can also consult their family doctors about diabetes and screening recommendations.

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world diabetes day
14 November

For World Diabetes Day 2024–26, the theme is Diabetes and Well-being that includes physical wellbeing, societal wellbeing and mental wellbeing. This year's campaign shines a spotlight on the workplace, highlighting the challenges faced by people living with diabetes and those at risk in the workplace and calling to "Know more and do more for diabetes at work". For more information about World Diabetes Day, please visit the thematic website at worlddiabetesday.org.

The DH in collaboration with the Labour Department and the Occupational Safety and Health Council has launched the "Joyful@Healthy Workplace" programme that aims to assist employers and employees to create a joyful and healthy working environment. The programme focuses on three areas, Healthy Eating, Physical Activity and Mental Health. All organisations and members of the public are welcome to join. For details, please visit the thematic website at joyfulhealthyworkplace.hk/en.

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