

PARENTING WITH LISA SALMON



Diabetes a worry for mum-to-be

Diabetes consultant Dr Eleanor Scott explains how raised blood glucose levels in pregnancy can lead to complications

'I'M diabetic and have just found out I'm pregnant. Is my diabetes likely to affect my baby, and how can I best reduce the risk of any effects?'

Dr Eleanor Scott, a consultant in diabetes and senior lecturer in medicine at the University of Leeds, says: "Many women with diabetes will have healthy babies, but the chance of experiencing complications increases.

"Diabetes takes a number of forms - types 1 and 2 are pre-existing conditions, and gestational diabetes develops during pregnancy and disappears after the baby is born.

"The key problem is the raised glucose level. If it's not controlled, the excess glucose will pass to the baby, with the result it will get large. That could lead to problems with the birth, the need for a caesarean section and, in tragic cases, stillbirth or babies born with abnormalities.

"You should make sure your blood glucose levels are regularly checked and peaks in blood sugar levels are controlled. That can be done through changes to diet, exercise and medication.

"Women with pre-existing diabetes should ensure they use effective contraception to avoid unplanned pregnancy, because of the increased risks. They should contact their GP before they plan to get pregnant so they can get the help needed to ensure their glucose is well controlled beforehand. This significantly reduces problems for the mum and baby during pregnancy.

"As a mum-to-be with diabetes, your health will be closely monitored by your hospital Diabetes in Pregnancy team - so you're not alone in working to keep your baby safe."



ELEANOR SCOTT: Women with diabetes should ensure they use effective contraception

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ON DEMENTIA DRUG

HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin



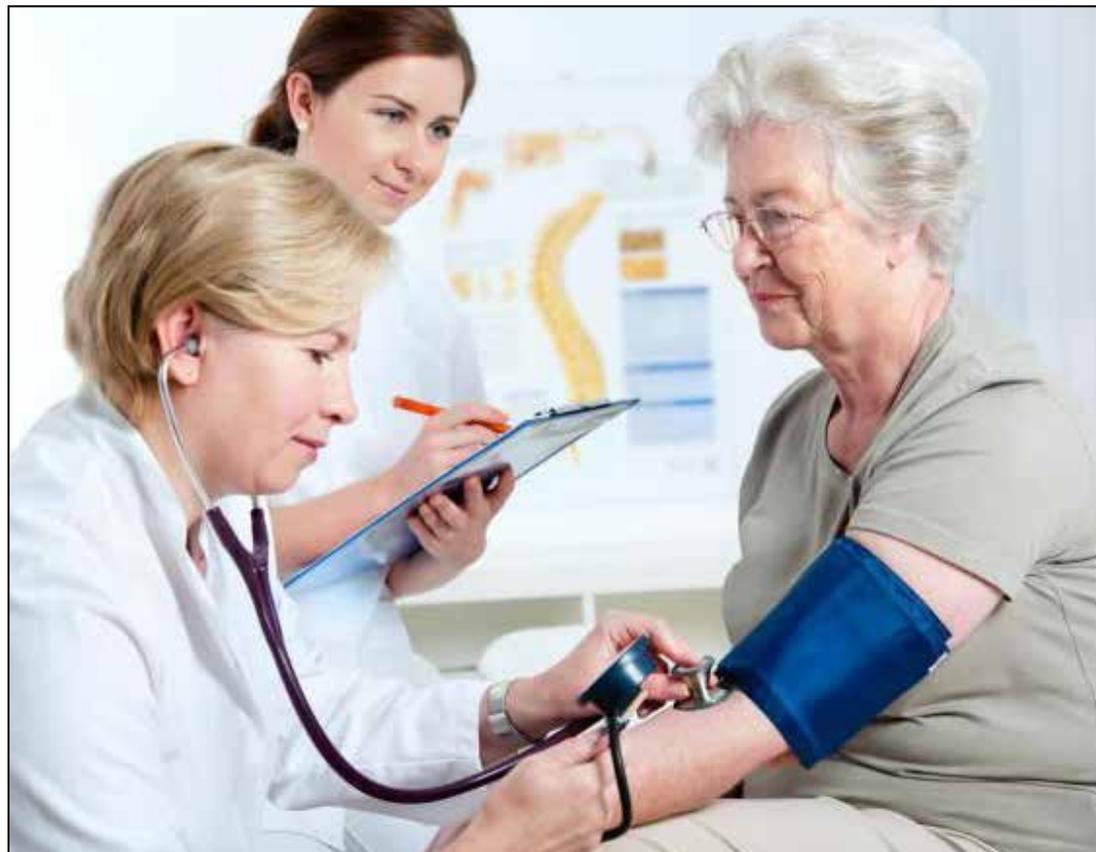
WITH no new drug treatments in the past 15 years, research demonstrating that a medication initially developed to treat diabetes also reverses the effects of Alzheimer's disease in mice, is heart-warming news indeed.

Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for somewhere between 50-75 per cent of cases. Currently there are around 850,000 people in the UK living with dementia, and with an ageing population this number is estimated to rise to one million by 2025 and double this number by 2051.

Dementia is a progressive disease that not only robs the individual of their memory and personality, but also the ability to carry out what would have been everyday tasks, leaving them completely dependent on others for their care.

The research was led by Professor Christian Holscher of the University of Lancaster, and showed that the condition of mice genetically engineered to develop Alzheimer's disease, improved after just two months of daily injection with a drug known as a "triple receptor agonist".

We already know that type 2 diabetes itself is a risk factor for the development of dementia. With the pancreas unable to produce adequate amounts of insulin, excessively high levels of sugar are left in the blood rather than being stored in the liver and muscles, and it is thought that this plays a role in brain degeneration. In addition we believe that insulin itself protects the brain and falling



KEEP DEMENTIA AT BAY: Looking after your weight, blood pressure and mood can all help reduce your chances of succumbing to dementia

levels of this may also promote dementia.

After two months of the drug, treated mice were much better at navigating a maze than at the start of the trial. They were found to have higher levels of chemicals which protect nerve function in the brain.

Examination of the mice's brain showed reduced amounts of the scar tissue, known as plaques, which essentially replaces normal functioning brain tissue in those suffering with Alzheimer's. Although this is only early research, and indeed

many animal trials have not demonstrated equally successful results in human studies, there is still reason to be cautiously optimistic, and with a drug that is already licensed it may not be long before human trials commence.

However, until we find a cure or at least something that halts or slows the progression of Alzheimer's, prevention remains the key. Poorly controlled blood pressure and diabetes are both linked with dementia, so getting on top of these is vitally important. Regular exercise and

stopping smoking have also been shown to help in the fight. Obesity now has greater recognition among healthcare professionals, so for those struggling with their weight, much can be done to help. Exercise will help with blood pressure, diabetes and weight control so for those who are able, it should be seen as a necessity. Finally, it may surprise you that depression is a risk factor for the development of dementia, so if you are struggling with your mood, please do get help rather than suffering in silence.

My GP won't give me pills to help me sleep

Q: I went to my GP because I was struggling to sleep, hoping for some pills to help me, but he didn't seem keen and wanted to talk about my mood and "sleep hygiene" - Hannah, 38

A: Insomnia is a very common issue with many people suffering from time to time. When assessing a sleep problems it is usual for your doctor to ask about your general wellbeing, both physical and mental. Lack of sleep may be caused by lying awake worrying about a particular issue or set of problems. Many doctors are reluctant to prescribe sleeping tablets because they are

addictive, many people suffer a "hangover" type feeling the next morning, and any beneficial effect soon wears off. Sleep hygiene is very important. Simple measures like going to bed at a regular time and having a dark room free from distractions may be the difference between a good night's sleep and tossing and turning all night long.

Q: My hands have always been cold as long as I can remember, sometimes painfully so, and I wondered if there was anything that can be done - Samantha; 45

A: It sounds like you may be suffering from a condition called Raynaud's phenomenon. In this

the hands and sometimes feet become very cold, painful and may take on shocking colours, especially in cold weather. It is thought that this is due to small blood vessels in the hands and feet narrowing in response to the drop in temperature.

A very simple measure is to wear gloves when outdoors and make sure you have warm socks as well. Regular exercise is recommended to maintain and improve your circulation and stopping smoking will also help (if this applies).

If you are still struggling despite this, your regular GP may suggest a trial of a medication which is

called nifedipine.

If you have a question for Dr Zak, please email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com

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Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.