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Understanding diabetes jargon

When speaking to your doctor about diabetes, some of the terminology can be confusing. Here's a quick guide to what all the medical mumbo jumbo means.

- **Basal bolus** – part of an injectable insulin regime. Basal insulins last for a long time but work slowly. Once or twice daily doses of these are complemented by top-up bolus doses of rapid-acting insulin to reduce high blood sugar when you eat.
- **Blood glucose meter** – machine using test strips to estimate blood sugar level
- **BM** – an outdated term. This abbreviation was used for a paper strip designed to estimate blood sugar levels. It has been replaced, but you may still hear your 'blood sugar' measurement referred to as 'BMs'.
- **Blood sugar level** – a value, in mmol/litre, of the sugar content (glucose) of your blood. Used in both diagnosis and monitoring of disease.
- **Blood sugar targets** – the agreed target range for your blood sugar level as part of your treatment
- **Carbohydrate 'carb' counting** – the process of monitoring food intake to help predict insulin need. Very useful in planning effective treatment, and gives you more power in managing your condition.
- **Diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA)** – a dangerous complication of type 1 (and rarely type 2) diabetes, where your body runs out of insulin and breaks down fatty acids instead. This causes toxic ketones to build up and the normal pH (acid-base balance) of your blood is affected.
- **Diabetic nephropathy** – kidney damage caused by long-term high blood sugar levels in diabetes.

- **Diabetic neuropathy** - a catch-all term for nerve damage caused by long-term high blood sugar levels in diabetes. Can lead to pain and to amputations in severe cases.
- **Diabetic retinopathy** - damage to the retina (back of the eye) caused by high blood glucose and vascular disease. Causes gradual loss of vision.
- **Diabetologist/Endocrinologist** - different terms for a doctor specialising in diabetes.
- **Glucose** - the basic sugar used by your body for energy. Measured in the blood using 'test strips' and a 'blood glucose meter.'
- **HbA1c** - a blood test used to estimate average blood sugar levels and control over the last three months.
- **Hyperglycaemia** - a state of high blood sugar (high blood glucose).
- **Hypoglycaemia** - a potentially dangerous state of low blood sugar (low blood glucose) - a possible side-effect of diabetes treatments, especially insulin and sulfonylureas.
- **Impaired glucose tolerance/pre-diabetes** - a state of high blood sugar, not high enough for a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes but meaning you are at higher risk of type 2 diabetes and its complications.
- **Insulin** - a hormone required to process sugar in the body.
- **Insulin pen** - a delivery device for injectable insulin. Comes in variable strengths.
- **Insulin pump** - a delivery device for constant or pulsed insulin injection. Attached through a tiny tube under your skin and worn 24 hours a day.
- **Ketosis** - the build-up of a toxic substance called ketones caused by your body breaking down fatty acids for energy when it runs out of insulin. Rare in type 2 diabetes, it can affect people with type 1 diabetes if they do not take enough insulin, are generally unwell, etc.
- **Ketotic coma (diabetic coma)** - an extremely dangerous state where blood toxicity caused by ketosis leads to unconsciousness, and if untreated, death.

- **Pancreas** – a body organ that produces insulin and other hormones.
- **Peripheral neuropathy** – nerve damage to the toes, feet, fingers and hands. Occurs progressively with diabetes if blood glucose levels are high over a long period
- **Rapid-acting insulin** – a quick-acting dose of insulin taken with meals. Mimics natural Insulin spike. Taken as part of your treatment regime.
- **Type 1 diabetes** – caused by the complete absence of insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas to metabolise glucose (sugars).
- **Type 2 diabetes** – is caused by a gradual wearing out of cellular transporters for glucose by a long period of elevated blood sugar (hyperglycaemia).
- **Quick-acting carbohydrate** – a form of carbohydrate designed to replace blood sugars quickly in the case of sudden hypoglycaemia. Can include sugary drinks, glucose tablets or sweets (candy). Injectable forms exist.

Global Diabetes Deaths – 2015

Global deaths in 2015 attributed to diabetes

Source: ()

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Last updated by:

Dr Ben Janaway, MBChB
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Peer reviewed by:

Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP
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