

HEALTH & Beauty

New Vision

YOUR WELLNESS GUIDE

Monday, September 10, 2018 28



DIABETES WREAKING HAVOC IN RURAL UGANDA

By Hope Mafaranga

"When my leg started swelling, I thought I had been bewitched. I tried using local herbs to treat the condition in vain," 50-year-old Regina Nanju, a resident of Kyadembe village in Watuba sub-county, Kyankwanzi district, says. When the herbs failed, she visited a number of witchdoctors for treatment to no avail.

"I used all sorts of herbs, but my leg continued rotting. I even clashed with my neighbours thinking they were after my life," she adds.

Her suspicion of witchcraft intensified when she started feeling thirsty, hungry and urinated frequently. The situation worsened with recurrent headache, amnesia and loss of sight. She struggled with bad health for three years until she went to Kiboga Hospital, where she was diagnosed with diabetes at the Multi Disciplinary Diabetic Clinic. The clinic was established by the Israel government in partnership with SBI International Holdings, a construction company. SBI made sure expert doctors piloted non-communicable diseases clinics, including diabetes in Uganda. The clinic in Kiboga was launched

by Noah Gal Gendler, the ambassador of Israel to Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Seychelles and Malawi.

Gendler says Israel will continue to extend support to Uganda.

Israel Yiga, the LC5 chairperson of Kiboga district, says the clinic has brought services nearer to the people, saving them from travelling long distances to Kampala for specialised treatment.

Another case

Just like Nanju, 21-year-old John Kyabasing of Lwanata in Kiboga, has a nerve-wracking story.

"In 2007, I started falling sick frequently — with bouts of fever. I always tested for malaria and HIV, but the results were always negative," he says. The father of one says he got so worried that he wrote a Will in anticipation of death.

"Not even painkillers would relieve me of headache; I was always thirsty and hungry; the toilet

became my second living room as I visited it almost every after 15 minutes to urinate," he says.

Kyabasinga says when he fell sick, diabetes was not anywhere on the list of diseases he suspected he had.

"Before I discovered that I was diabetic, I made many wrong decisions regarding my health,"

Kyabasinga, who has been receiving insulin injections since 2017, says.

Kyabasinga says before he went to the clinic, he used to spend sh30,000 on

insulin injections monthly — something he could barely afford.

"Sometimes, I would go without drugs due to the cost implication. My life became a living hell; I always felt dizzy and lost a lot of weight," he says.

Dr Shay Pintov, a volunteer at the Multi-Disciplinary Diabetic Clinic in Kiboga, says the facility currently serves Kyankwanzi, Mubende, Kiboga, Mityana and the neighbouring districts.

He says their target is to screen all the people in Kiboga for diabetes. They also want to sensitise them on the dangers of the disease.

Among the people present during the launch of the clinic were two children with diabetes.

What is diabetes?

Dr. Pintov says one gets diabetes when the blood glucose (blood sugar) levels rise. High levels of glucose in blood can cause health problems over time. The main types of diabetes are type 1, type 2, and gestational.

Type 1 diabetes

Pintov says a person develops type 1 diabetes when their immune system destroys the insulin-producing beta cells

of the pancreas.

"Type 1 diabetes is caused by genes and environmental factors such as viruses that might trigger the disease," he says.

Type 2 diabetes

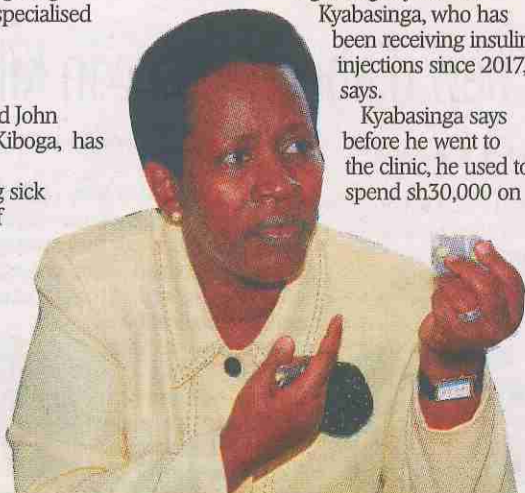
Pintov says type 2 diabetes usually begins with insulin resistance, a condition in which muscles, the liver, and fat cells fail to use insulin well.

He says as a result, the body demands more insulin to help glucose enter the cells. At first, the pancreas makes more insulin to keep up with the increased demand. "Over time, the pancreas fails to make enough insulin, forcing blood glucose levels to rise," he says.

Symptoms

Pintov says symptoms of diabetes include increased thirst, urination, hunger, fatigue, blurred vision, numbness or tingling in the feet or hands, sores that do not heal and unexplained weight loss. However, he notes that many people do not have symptoms, adding that it is the reason regular check up is necessary.

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Dr Diana Atwine says the risk of developing diabetes also increases with age

HEALTH
VIEW POINT



Lillian Namusoke Magezi
Let's work to prevent diabetes

The disease trends in Uganda and the world over are increasingly moving from infectious to non-communicable diseases. Non-communicable diseases are usually chronic and are expensive to manage. These conditions are also referred to as lifestyle diseases, which means that the way we live predisposes us to developing them. Such diseases include diabetes, chronic kidney disease, cancer and cardiovascular diseases. In today's edition, we have focused on diabetes.

I encourage you to read our lead story to find out what you can do to prevent or delay the onset of the condition. Those who already have diabetes, learn what you can do to manage it and improve the quality of your life.

I wish you a nice week.

Villages suffering with diabetes

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Effects of diabetes

Pintov says diabetes affects almost every part of the body, adding that managing blood glucose can help prevent many of the complications that are linked to the condition.

"People with diabetes are prone to heart diseases, stroke, nerve damage, foot problems, gum disease and other dental problems. They are also at a higher risk of kidney failure, sexual and bladder problems," he says.

Who is at risk?

Dr Diana Atwine, the health ministry permanent secretary, says risk factors for developing diabetes include obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and physical inactivity.

"The risk of developing diabetes also increases as people grow older. People who are above the age of 40 and overweight are more likely to develop diabetes," she says.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes

Dr Peter Isaga, the Kiboga Hospital Superintendent, says most people develop type 2 diabetes if they have a family history of diabetes, are overweight or above the age of 45.

"Physical inactivity, race and certain health conditions also increase your chances of developing type 2 diabetes. A history of gestational diabetes is a risk factor for women," he explains.

Isaga says they have plans to integrate diabetes screening into other departments, especially in maternal health.

He is, however, quick to add that the hospital has limited resources. "We get only sh162m for primary healthcare for the whole year. Incorporating diabetes screening means our budget needs to be increased. The intense of screening diabetes has also increased the number of patients, yet we have the capacity of accommodating only 100 patients," he says.

Managing the disease

Atwine says it is important for a person with diabetes to make a meal plan and follow a strict diet aimed at controlling blood glucose. This should be accompanied with physical exercise.



A patient being tested for diabetes at Kiboga Hospital. Photo by Hope Mafaranga

"Moderate physical activity most days of the week also helps control blood glucose. Talk with your health care team about a plan for eating and physical activity that is right for you," Dr Atwine advises.

Prevention

Atwine also explains that managing diabetes means managing the blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels and quitting smoking (if one is a smoker).

She says taking small steps such as eating less and taking regular walks to lose weight can help one to prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes or its related problems.

"Walk more often. Walk, dance, bike ride, swim and play with a ball and eat healthy food," she says.

Treatment

Pintov advises people with diabetes to follow their treatment plan, which may include taking pills, insulin or other shots and medicine for related health problems.

"Some types of surgery such as weight loss surgery

may be an option for certain patients," he says.

Healthy food

Pivot urges people to focus on eating less. "Eat fiber-rich fruits and vegetables each day. Choose whole grain foods such as whole wheat bread and crackers, oatmeal, brown rice and cereals. Cut down on fatty and fried foods. You still can have foods you enjoy, just eat smaller servings and drink a lot of water," he says.

He also advises people with diabetes to set goals they can achieve; for example, doing physicals for at least 15 minutes every week.

"Each week add five minutes until you build up to at least 30 minutes five days a week. Try to cut 150 calories out of your diet each day (a can of soda). Slowly reduce your calories over time. Talk to your healthcare team about your goals," Pintov who is also diabetic, emphasises.

Keep records

He also advises patients to keep track of their progress.

"Write down all the things you eat and drink and the number of minutes you are active. Keeping a diary is one of the best ways to stay focused and reach your goals. This has helped me in the over 20 years I have been diabetic," he advises.



Dr Aceng says she is worried about the lifestyle of Ugandans

Practical way to manage diabetes

Jessica Nsubuga, a diabetic living in Bukomero, Kyankwanzi district, says no one can fight diabetes alone. "Ask your family and friends to help you out. Involve them in your activities and join a support group in your area to help you stay on track. For example, after dinner, I often take a walk with my family instead of watching TV," she says.

Health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng says she is worried of the high rate at which Ugandans were consuming alcohol, smoking and eating fast and processed foods, all of which predispose them to diabetes.

"Alcohol, tobacco, cigarettes and eating fast foods are dangerous to one's life. Such risky behaviour increases the chances of one being diabetic. I want to appeal to you to adopt a better lifestyle and embrace good eating habits with food that is nutritious to the body," she says.

Residents, patients speak out on the new diabetes clinic in Kiboga

Disan Ssebyaayi, 30, resident of Byerima Kyankwanzi:

A year ago, I started getting abrupt wounds on different parts of my body. I went to Mengo Hospital in Kampala and I was told that I was diabetic. I did not know much about the condition. A month after the tests, I fell so ill and I was bedridden. I was taken to Hoima Hospital and started on diabetes treatment with insulin injections. However, I would miss out on my medication many times as I would lack money to purchase them until a friend told me about the Diabetes clinic at Kiboga hospital. At the clinic, I receive free treatment including sugar tests and insulin that I inject myself. However, sometimes I lack transport to go to the clinic.

Margaret Nantale, 35, resident of Kiyombya, Kyankwanzi:

I always give birth to my children by C-section. However, the wounds would take long to heal. Two years ago, I got a wound on my foot, but it could not heal even after the use of all treatments and local hubs. When I went to Mulago Hospital, I was told that I had diabetes and started on treatment. At the diabetes clinic we were told not to eat foods rich in starch such as cassava and white rice. However, it is the one we can afford.



Peter Nyanzi, 72, resident of Kizinga Kiboga district:

I cannot tell when exactly I got diabetes, however in 2016, I got wounds and after tests, they found out that I was diabetic. I am following the doctors' orders, especially on taking tablets. At the diabetes clinic, I get free medication but sometimes the clinic runs out of drugs. Buying them from private clinics is quite expensive as drugs for a month go for about sh10,000 to sh20,000.



Jessica Nabukenya, 29, a resident of Kirurumba B, Kiboga district:

I used to feel dizzy and because I was using family planning pills, I thought those were just their side effects. In 2017, I started getting body pains and when I went to a clinic I found out that I was diabetic and started buying diabetes medication.

I enrolled at the diabetes clinic at Kiboga in July 2018, and started getting free treatment and tests. However, patients are many. This makes patients wait for long. The diabetes clinic at the hospital needs more personnel.

