

Diabetes: on the rise, but the disease can be prevented, mitigated

Around one in nine adults in South Africa has diabetes, which equates to about 4.2 million people.

However, the actual number could be a lot higher; it is estimated that 50% of people with diabetes don't even know they have it and therefore remain untreated.

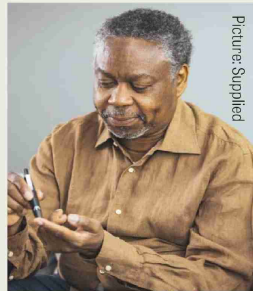
Over the past decade cases have doubled. Today it is the second most common cause of death in the country. The disease is largely preventable.

Diabetes explained

Diabetes is a chronic condition

that influences how the body absorbs blood sugar or glucose. There are two types: type 1 and type 2. The former is a genetic condition that develops when the pancreas fails to produce insulin, a hormone that naturally occurs in the body.

"Type 2 diabetes is most common in adulthood, although increasing numbers of younger people are being diagnosed with it," says Dr Peter Makhambeni, chief clinician of the National HealthCare Group, a provider of several low-cost primary health-



care solutions.

Diabetes results from a poor uptake of insulin by the body.

"Insulin is produced by the pancreas to convert sugars and food into energy for our daily activities. Without enough insulin, the body cannot manage its blood sugar levels. This can lead to kidney disease, strokes, heart attacks, blindness, nerve damage and ultimately death.

"Being overweight and inactive are risk factors for type 2 diabetes. The risk of developing the disease increases with age."

adds Dr Makhambeni. Diabetics have options available to them to help manage the disease through insulin therapy or changing negative lifestyle habits.

Follow a healthy diet and eat smaller portions. Regular exercise is advised as physical activity helps people lose weight and regulates blood sugar levels.

Once a person has been diagnosed with diabetes treatment must be started and correctly maintained to ensure optimal control of blood sugar levels. – *Citizen reporter*