

Lifestyle Over and Above Drugs in Diabetes (LOADD)

A University of Otago study, examining whether diabetes treatment using lifestyle as well as drugs is better than a drugs only treatment, could go on to become multi-national study.

The three-year HRC-funded project is being headed by Senior Research Fellow Dr Kirsten Coppell and Professor Jim Mann, Director of the Edgar National Centre for Diabetes Research.

“The study will in the first instance consider the effects on diabetes control, lipid metabolism, and other risk factors for heart disease - as well as look at clinical events such as who gets heart attacks and who dies,” says Dr Coppell.

“If all goes well it could be extended to become a very large randomised control trial involving collaborators in Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Italy and Germany who are ready to come onboard,” Professor Mann adds.

Until recently diabetes treatment had a particularly strong focus on lifestyle aspects such as diet and exercise but, he says, there are so many more drugs available now that some patients seem to think they don't need to watch their diet and exercise.

“I am taking a statin pill for my cholesterol, I'm taking blood pressure pills, I'm taking all these pills or maybe insulin for my diabetes, I don't need to pay such careful attention to lifestyle, is a not infrequent reaction from some people with diabetes.”

The LOADD study will look at whether they get extra mileage from lifestyle changes even when they are on multiple drug treatment, says Dr Coppell.

“We already know that lifestyle can influence diabetes control and lipids, cholesterol and blood pressure. What we don't know - and it has never been studied before - is the extent to which lifestyle treatment provides additional benefit when people are on all these powerful drugs.”

Volunteers with type 2 diabetes will be divided into two groups - one group who will just go on doing whatever they're doing for six months, with the usual basic lifestyle advice, while the other group will be given very intensive lifestyle advice.

Dr Coppell says the main focus will be diet, with an emphasis on high fibre, fruit and vegetables, with modest levels of carbohydrate.

“I tend to call it lifestyle treatment now, I don't call it diet. If you call it lifestyle treatment it puts it into the same category as drug treatment - it's just a different kind of treatment.”

Professor Mann says diabetes is a modern epidemic and is causing the disintegration of some clinical services including renal dialysis - but we still don't know how prevalent it is.

A minimum estimate of diagnosed cases in New Zealand would be 150,000 but that does not include people who have diabetes and don't know about it. The most conservative estimate is that for every two diagnosed cases there is one undiagnosed, so 225,000 is a reasonable estimate, he says.

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Key words:

Diabetes treatment, lifestyle

Key facts:

- Diabetes is the leading cause of death and disability in New Zealand
- For every two diagnosed cases of diabetes in New Zealand, there is approximately one undiagnosed case.

Aims of this research:

- To determine the extent to which lifestyle treatment provides additional benefit to people with type-2 diabetes on drugs.