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The Medical Library Association

has developed this pamphlet to help you decipher some common diabetes-related “medspeak” terms. You’ll also find some tips on how to identify quality health care information on the Internet.

Deciphering Diabetes Medspeak

A **A1C** – A test of the average amount of glucose in the blood over the last several months. It is often given to newly diagnosed diabetic patients.

ADULT-ONSET DIABETES – former term for Type 2 Diabetes

ADVANCED GLYCOSYLATION END PRODUCTS (AGEs) – produced in the body when glucose binds with protein. They can lead to diabetes complications because they play a role in damaging blood vessels.

ALPHA CELL – a cell in the pancreas that produces and releases the hormone glucagon

ALPHA-GLUCOSIDASE INHIBITORS – a class of drugs that help the body lower blood glucose levels by blocking the breakdown of starches and some sugars. They should be taken with the first bite of a meal.

AMYLIN – a hormone produced by beta cells in the pancreas that controls glucose release into the bloodstream after eating by slowing the emptying of the stomach

B **BETA CELL** – a cell in the pancreas that produces the hormone insulin

BIGUANIDES – a class of drugs that help lower blood glucose levels by lowering the amount of glucose made by the liver

BLOOD GLUCOSE – the main sugar from the food we eat that is found in the blood and used as the body's main source of energy

BLOOD GLUCOSE MONITORING – a way to manage diabetes by regularly checking one's blood glucose level. The test strips alternate colors when touched by a blood sample.

BOLUS – for a diabetic patient, it is an extra dose of insulin taken to handle a rise in blood glucose. It is given through an insulin pump.

BRITTLE DIABETES – a term used when a diabetic patient's blood glucose level goes from low to high for an uncertain reason

C **CHOLESTEROL** – a soft, waxy substance found in the nervous system, skin, muscle, liver, intestines, and heart. It is made by the body and also obtained from animal products in the diet.

C-PEPTIDE TEST – a test that helps determine how much insulin the body is making. It is measured to differentiate insulin produced by the body from insulin injected into the body.

CREATININE – a waste product from protein which should be at a constant level in the blood. When creatinine levels rise in the blood, it can be a sign that the kidneys are diseased.

D **DAWN PHENOMENON** – the common rise in the blood glucose level experienced by a diabetic patient early in the morning

DEXTROSE – another word for glucose or simple sugar in the blood

DIALYSIS – the artificial process of filtering the blood when the kidneys are not able to cleanse it

DIABETES – the shorthand term for a medical condition called diabetes mellitus. Diabetes results when the body cannot use blood glucose as energy because there is too little insulin or the body is unable to use insulin. (See also Type 1 diabetes, Type 2 diabetes.)

D-PHENYLALANINE DERIVATIVES (Nateglinide) – a class of drugs that lowers blood glucose levels by helping the pancreas produce more insulin immediately following meals

- E EUGLYCEMIA** – a normal blood glucose level
- F FASTING BLOOD GLUCOSE TEST** – a blood sample test used to diagnose pre-diabetes and diabetes (A level greater than 140 mg/dl is generally considered diagnostic for diabetes.)
- G GLOMERULAR FILTRATION RATE** – an indicator of the kidney's ability to filter and remove waste products
- GLUCAGON** – a hormone produced by the alpha cells in the pancreas that increases the level of glucose in the blood
- GLUCOSE** – the main sugar from the food we eat
- GLYCEMIC INDEX** – a ranking of foods that can raise blood sugar levels (carbohydrates) within a two-hour period. The faster a carbohydrate enters the bloodstream, the higher its glycemic index.
- H HUMAN LEUKOCYTE ANTIGENS (HLA)** – proteins that influence the function of the body's immune system by identifying foreign substances. Certain patterns can determine an increased risk of developing Type 1 diabetes.
- HYPERGLYCEMIA** – a condition that usually affects Type 1 diabetics when a patient's blood sugar is abnormally high. Symptoms include thirst, frequent urination, blurred vision and fatigue. A diabetic coma can result if the patient has forgotten to take insulin.
- HYPERLIPIDEMIA** – above normal fat and cholesterol levels in the blood that can speed hardening of the arteries
- HYPEROSMOLAR HYPERGLYCEMIC NONKETONIC SYNDROME (HHNS)** – a very dangerous condition in which the patient's blood glucose level is too high and ketones cannot be found in the blood or urine. If left untreated, can lead to coma or death.

Rx Riddles Solved!

Doctors, pharmacists and others use a medical “shorthand.” What difference does it make if your doctor’s handwriting isn’t legible? It might mean the difference between AP and ap!

āā	- ana, so much of each
a.c.	- ante cibum, before meals
ad effect	- until effective
ad lib	- as much as desired
AP	- ante partum, before childbirth
ap	- ante prandium, before dinner
aq	- aqua, water
bid	- bis in die, twice each day
ċ	- cum, with
dbl	- double
h.s.	- hora somni, at bedtime
i.d.	- idem, the same
IM	- intramuscular
k	- constant
mb	- misce bene, mix well
MDR	- minimum daily requirement
MED	- minimum effective dose
npo	- nil peros, nothing by mouth
ō	- nono, without
O.D.	- oculus dexter, right eye
O.S.	- oculus sinister, left eye
ṑ	- post, after
per os	- by mouth
prn	- pro re nata, as needed
qh	- quaque hora, every hour
qid	- quater in die, four times each day
qv	- quantum vis, as much as you wish
Rx	- recipe, prescription
STAT	- statim, immediately
sum	- sumat, let it be taken
T or T°	- temperature
t	- time
tid	- ter in die, three times each day
ut dict	- ut dictum, as directed
vid	- see
w	- weight
w/	- with
X	- unknown factor

HYPOGLYCEMIA – abnormally low blood sugar levels (at or below 70 mg/dl); symptoms in adults (which may indicate diabetes) include jitteriness, rapid breathing, and lethargy.

I INSULIN – a hormone made by the beta cells of the pancreas that controls the amount of sugar in the blood by moving it into the cells, where it can be used by the body for energy.

INSULIN RESISTANCE – occurs when the body is not responding to the insulin that the pancreas is making and glucose is less able to enter the cells.

J JUVENILE DIABETES – the former term for Type I diabetes

K KETONE – a chemical produced when there is a shortage of insulin in the blood and the body breaks down body fat for energy

KETOSIS – ketosis is the body's process of burning stored fat for energy when glucose is not readily available. The symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and stomach pain.

KIDNEYS – two organs in the lower back that filter waste and excess fluid from the blood and passes them out of the body as urine

L LIVER – the largest organ in the body. It changes food into energy, removes alcohol and poisons from the blood and makes bile.

M MEGLITINIDES – a class of drugs that stimulate the release of insulin. They are taken before each of three meals.

MIXED DOSE – when two types of insulin are combined into one injection, usually to provide the patient with short-term and long-term control of blood glucose levels

S SELF-MANAGEMENT – a term used to describe an individual treatment plan for keeping diabetes under control. Treatment can include planned meals, physical activity, monitoring blood glucose levels and taking medications.

SULFONYLUREAS – a class of drugs that help the beta cells of the pancreas release more insulin (in a different way than meglitinides). They are generally taken one to two times a day, before meals.

T THIAZOLIDINEDIONES – a class of drugs that help insulin work better in the muscle and fat and also reduce glucose production in the liver. They are taken once or twice a day with food. (Patients taking these drugs should be carefully monitored by a physician because thiazolidinediones can have a rare but serious effect on the liver.)

TRIGLYCERIDE – the technical term for fat

TYPE 1 DIABETES – a condition that occurs when the pancreas doesn't produce insulin. Type 1 diabetes is also called juvenile diabetes because it is often diagnosed in children or young adults.

TYPE 2 DIABETES – a condition that occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin, or when the cells are unable to use insulin properly, which is called insulin resistance. Type 2 diabetes is commonly called “adult-onset diabetes” since it is often diagnosed later in life.

U URINE ALBUMIN TEST – a test to measure the amount of protein in the urine. An abnormal amount could indicate kidney disease.

Diagnosing Diabetes Web sites

The Medical Library Association (MLA) finds the following Web sites particularly useful for understanding diabetes. For a current list, visit www.mlanet.org.

The American Diabetes Association

<http://www.diabetes.org>

Web site features: news section, overview of the disease, risk test, statistics, nutrition and healthy recipes section.

National Diabetes Education Program (National Institute of Health and Centers for Disease Control)

<http://ndep.nih.gov/>

Web site features: information for minorities, Spanish language and Asian-American information, tips on how to prevent and control diabetes, children and adolescent resources.

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease, National Institute of Health)

<http://www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/>

Web site features: treatment options, complications and prevention, statistics, clinical trials, Spanish language information and links to additional resources.

Joslin Diabetes Center (Harvard Medical School)

<http://www.joslin.harvard.edu/>

Web site features: news section, discussion boards, library of terms, online classes, Spanish and Asian-American sections.

Children With Diabetes

<http://www.childrenwithdiabetes.com>

Web site features: news section, library of terms, children's section, parents section and "ask the experts" section.

MEDLINEplus® from the National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

Web site features: health topics, drug information, medical encyclopedia, library of terms, general health news and directories for locating doctors and hospitals.

The Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS) of MLA evaluates Web sites based on the following criteria: credibility, sponsorship/authorship, content, audience, currency, disclosure, purpose, links, design, interactivity and disclaimers. See the consumer health library directory at http://caphis.mlanet.org/directory/find_a_library.html.



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