

August 1, 2018

Media Statement

HOPES NEW WA RESEARCH WILL ENCOURAGE ACTIVITY IN PATIENTS WITH DIABETES

West Australian researchers have discovered high blood sugar levels in people with type 1 diabetes don't negatively impact exercise performance.

It's hoped the findings from the Diabetes Research WA-funded project, to be presented at the Australasian Diabetes Congress in Adelaide on August 22, will encourage those with the condition to stay active.

Dr Karen Rothacker, a Perth Childrens Hospital endocrinology and diabetes fellow who supervised the research, described the results as a surprise.

"We suspected exercising with high blood glucose levels could have a negative effect on athletic performance and thought this belief, coupled with difficulties in managing high blood sugar levels, may be deterring some type 1 diabetes patients from staying active," she said.

"We discovered that while young people with type 1 should strive for good glycaemic control while exercising, for its well-established long-term benefits, it may not be necessary to aggressively treat high blood sugar before and during exercise to optimise sporting performance."

Dr Rothacker anticipated the discovery would support people with type 1 diabetes to exercise more.

"We're hopeful this information will give this group confidence that even if, despite their best intentions, their blood sugar is high prior to sport, they still have the potential to perform well, they'll continue to participate," she explained.

"Even though type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition not caused by an unhealthy lifestyle, if these patients can stay more physically active it may reduce their risk of developing cardiovascular disease – which they're more at risk of, help keep their weight in a healthy range, boost their overall sense of well-being, and improve their ability to cope with stress."

Diabetes Research WA executive director Sherl Westlund said with type 1 on the rise in WA children, as well as nationally and internationally, research to support the ongoing health of those with it was critical.

"This research has the potential to help reduce some of the health complications that can affect those with type 1 diabetes and that clearly is a wonderful outcome for these people and their families, and also saves crucial health system dollars," said Ms Westlund.

The project involved exercise testing of 12 West Australian young adults with type 1 diabetes and its findings have also just been presented at The American Diabetes Association, 78th Scientific Sessions in Florida.

Diabetes Research WA, based at Royal Perth Hospital, was established in 1976 to stimulate research into diabetes in Western Australia and has distributed more than \$5.65 million dollars for this work.

For information, please visit www.diabetesresearchwa.com.au or call (08) 9224 1006.

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