

ASK THE EXPERT: Type 1 diabetes in children - an expensive disorder



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Type 1 diabetes is a lifelong disorder. Treatment of diabetes in children aims to keep blood glucose control near normal levels and ensure right nutrition and appropriate growth in them. When a child is diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, daily insulin and monitoring of blood glucose levels along with right diet and exercise is required. This is to manage normal or near-normal blood sugar levels. Doctor consultations and other diagnostic tests are required at periodic intervals on a continuous basis. This need for strict adherence imposes huge responsibility on their parents and increases mental, physical, social and economic pressures.

Expenses involved in type 1 diabetes management

Direct Expenses

Medical Costs: Cost of insulin, syringes, glucometer, strips, other health issues and diagnostic tests, cost for regular doctor visits and visit to other health care professionals.

Non-Medical costs: Although we all eat food, but then having healthy food is far more expensive than eating junk food. E.g. an apple is substantially expensive as compared to a packet of biscuit. A burger or samosa costs around Rs. 20 whereas a healthy meal with vegetables and dal would cost atleast Rs. 50.

Additional costs: Traveling cost. E.g. children need to travel along with their parents to the treatment centre. This is a big expense especially for a child living in rural area as they have to travel long distances to reach speciality centre.

Other costs: Costs of dealing acute complications like hypoglycaemia and DKA and other concomitant illness.

Indirect Costs

Productive time lost: Costs due to loss of productivity e.g., time lost from work for parent of a child with type 1 diabetes. It's there for every parent but it becomes more evident for a daily wage worker or parents working in unstructured organizations.

Decreased Quality of life: Cost from anxiety, inconvenience and other factors which decrease quality of life, are also heavy.

Cost of dealing mental trauma: Cost while dealing with their child's stress and trauma faced by them and other family members.

Cost of not taking care of diabetes

The price of not taking care of ourselves or our children with diabetes is very high. The largest single item of diabetes expenditure is hospital admissions for the treatment of both acute complications like diabetic ketoacidosis and long term complications such as heart disease and stroke, kidney failure, and foot problems. These complications develop over many years after diagnosis of type 1 diabetes and are mostly due to high blood glucose levels and can affect any organ in the body.

Brighter side of the coin

Although children with diabetes are living with a life long disorder, they need not have a bleak future. There is definitely a possibility that they can live long, complication-free life with diabetes. They can enter almost any profession which they like and live successful and productive lives. By keeping blood glucose levels to near normal, one can avoid most of the complications of type 1 diabetes. Diet, exercise, insulin, monitoring and diabetes education are essential for proper management of type 1 diabetes.

Ultimate goal for treatment

Ultimate goal for treatment is to maintain blood glucose levels near normal as uncontrolled diabetes is a serious condition and can cause many complication. Medical and social support both needs to be delivered. This is to ensure that our children

with diabetes live long, healthy and nearly normal lives. Although costs play a role but judicious use of resources and support from health care systems can do lot to change lives of children with diabetes.

Current Indian Scenario

Adequate management of type 1 diabetes requires intensive insulin treatment and monitoring. Economic deprivation in a large segment of population results in poor access to health care.

Poor educational status leads to non-utilization of scanty health services and increase in avoidable risk factors. This leads to decrease in quality of life, increase in complications and reduced life expectancy. In addition there are problems like job, marriage, medical insurance etc. There is a need for society and corporate sector to look in to this area and give preference to people with type 1 diabetes for job or at least they should not be refused to a job.

Changing Diabetes in Children (CDiC) program

Novo Nordisk Education Foundation along with 21 specialized centres across India has tried to address the critical gap in the management of type 1 diabetes through its CDiC program for economically under privileged children with type 1 diabetes. The 4000 children registered in the program are provided with free doctor consultations, human insulin, glucometer, strips, HbA_{1c} test, other essential diagnostic tests and diabetes education on regular basis. CDiC aims to support normal and healthy childhood in these children with type 1 diabetes, so that they grow into healthy adults. It is just a beginning; the need of the hour is to support all children with type 1 diabetes in all possible ways so that these children grow into healthy and responsible citizens.

If you would like to have more information on type 1 diabetes you can write to us at:

Diabetes Educator

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