

An open letter to diabetes from NKF

Dear Mr and Ms Diabetes,

Today 14 November is World Diabetes Day, it is a reminder of the grim facts and serious problem that we are facing, not only in Singapore but in many other countries globally.

We declared a War on Diabetes in 2016 and 4 years on we are still fighting this war and talking about you. And here's why we should be: In Singapore, an estimated 400,000 people aged 18 years old and above have diabetes, almost half of them do not know they have such a condition. If nothing is done, the number of diabetics in Singapore is estimated to grow to 1,000,000 in 2050.

It is also evident that you, Diabetes, caused serious and irreversible kidney failure to someone who embraces you. You have claimed many precious lives when they did not understand, monitor and manage you properly. You remain the main cause of kidney failure with 2 in 3 cases of kidney failure due to you. An undesirable feat that you have laid claimed to more than once.

High blood sugar makes the kidneys work harder, and may damage the tiny filtering units, known as nephrons, inside the kidneys over a long period of time. The kidneys will begin to leak protein (albumin) into the urine instead of keeping it in the blood. The damage is permanent and gets worse with time, leading to more fluid and toxic wastes staying in the blood instead of being passed out into the urine.

And you do not just stop there. After wreaking havoc on the kidneys, the poorly functioning kidneys are not able to regulate blood pressure adequately in the body. This eventually leads to high blood pressure in diabetic chronic kidney disease.

You have caused many people to have a new normal for day-to-day living. Diabetes-induced kidney failure compromises not only an individual's quality of life but also that of his loved ones and the whole family.

The cost of diabetes to Singapore is expected to soar beyond S\$2.5 billion with the rising number of diabetics. To combat this terrifying future, many tools, technologies, drugs and resources are being put forward to take you on.

Today is not about you, but really it is about hundreds of thousands of Singaporeans living with or supporting someone with diabetes, to educate and raise awareness about the disease, and its dire and lifelong consequences.

In the past, you would silently sneak up on unsuspecting individuals because many people think of diabetes as simply an issue of high sugar levels. You are difficult to spot, and most are unaware and those who are aware that they are afflicted with the disease, feel fine and so they do not take you seriously.

While kidney failure cannot be reversed, diabetes can be prevented or controlled.

We all know that managing you, diabetes, a chronic condition that requires long term care has not been easy.

However, winning small day-to-day battles such as swapping out our daily cup of kopi for kopi siew dai should never be underestimated. We will continue to strive and persevere in our attempt to fight against kidney failure and keep you at bay.

Lastly, here's to you - for the progress we have made against you, reflecting on the reasons that you still exist, and hopeful for a future without you.

Tim Oei

Chief Executive Officer

The National Kidney Foundation

