

YOUR GPs CAN TREAT THESE CONDITIONS

The GPFirst Programme was launched in 2014 to encourage patients in eastern Singapore to see their general practitioners (GPs) for mild to moderate medical conditions, rather than head straight to the emergency department. In this regular series, our eastern community GPs offer advice on common ailments *Caring* readers might face.

In this issue, we focus on diabetes and travel medication. Do visit www.gpfirst.sg or see your GP for more information on other common conditions such as nausea, headaches, sprains, fevers, cuts and bruises and mild scalds.

DIABETES MELLITUS

I am a 48-year-old housewife who loves food. A recent health screening at a community centre revealed that my Body Mass Index (BMI) is 33.1 kg/m². Lately, I have been feeling thirsty more often, so I stocked up on my favourite homemade sweetened chrysanthemum tea in the fridge. I also frequent the bathroom many times a day. Additionally, I have noticed that my skin has turned dry and itchy! My husband thinks these could be signs of diabetes and has strongly advised me to see a GP. How can my GP diagnose my condition?

Diabetes is a common chronic condition, in which your blood sugar (blood glucose) rises to a high level. Your husband is correct to say that frequent thirst and urination may be symptoms of diabetes.

Other symptoms include increased



appetite or excessive hunger, weight loss, lethargy, slow-healing wounds, blurred vision, numbness or tingling sensations in the hands and feet. The skin may become dry and itchy, while some patients may have velvety dark skin around the neck and armpits. In women, recurrent yeast and urinary tract infections may develop, while poorly controlled diabetes in males may lead to erectile dysfunction.

Some risk factors for diabetes include obesity, a family history of diabetes, a history of gestational diabetes and high cholesterol levels.

Your GP or family physician can diagnose and treat diabetes. Typically, he will first conduct a series of blood tests to measure your blood glucose levels. If required, he



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may also perform an oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT) at a later stage to confirm the diagnosis. In addition, your cholesterol levels and blood pressure will also be measured.

If your test results show that you have diabetes, your GP will begin discussing treatment options, tailoring them to the amount of glucose control that is needed. Treatment usually takes a holistic approach, which includes monitoring your condition and possible complications, lifestyle modifications and medication, if needed.

Strict adherence to a low-sugar or low-carbohydrate diet, coupled with regular moderate-intensity exercise of 150 minutes or more per week, aiming for gradual weight loss, will help improve blood-glucose control.

It is essential to identify complications of diabetes early. Regular check-ups and compliance with prescribed medications are important. In today's clinics, there are a wide variety of medications from which GPs will carefully select to suit each patient's needs.

If you experience the above symptoms or if you are above the age of 40 and have never had your blood sugar levels checked, we encourage you to consult your family doctor. ☺

TRAVEL MEDICINE

I am a 21-year-old tertiary student who will be graduating in a few months. My friends and I are planning to go on a 20-day graduation trip to Taiwan. As this is the first time I am travelling abroad for a long period, I am unsure which medicines I should take with me. I have also heard that the bus ride into Alishan National Park is pretty rough and I am worried about motion sickness. How can my GP help me?

Congratulations on your graduation! Taiwan can be a really fun place for a visit, and you wouldn't want illness to spoil the fun. Although healthcare in Taiwan is very accessible, you would not want to have to

change your itinerary at the last minute to accommodate a clinic visit.

Firstly, always buy travel insurance — it is a small price to pay for peace of mind.

Secondly, always get vaccinated early, as it takes time for the body to build immunity against diseases. Check the official CDC website (bit.ly/cdctaiwan) for the vaccinations you will need. Again, this is a small price to pay for not losing precious time on your vacation!

Thirdly, always carry medication in your personal bag — not in your check-in luggage. Most GPs will have a set of travel medications that they can recommend. These will usually include those for pain, stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, allergies, sore throat, motion sickness and, for ladies, medication to control menstruation. And of course, if you suffer from conditions such as asthma, don't forget to take along your regular medication for them.

As for motion sickness, medication typically prescribed for it should work, provided that you have no drug allergies. You can take them an hour before the bus ride. Be aware, however, that they can cause drowsiness.

Otherwise, bon voyage! ☺



Dr Paul Ang is the founding director of Zenith Medical Clinic in Punggol, deputy director of Class Primary Care Network and director of MaNaDr Mobile Health. His passion is education and mentorship, and he strongly believes that by applying the Socratic method and asking younger learners the right questions, we can help them learn and make the world a better place.

