

Medical scheme

DIABETES INSIPIDUS

This information sheet is for your information and is not a substitute for medical advice. You should contact your doctor or other healthcare provider with any questions about your health, treatment or care.

What is diabetes insipidus?

Diabetes insipidus is a condition characterised by the excretion of large amounts of severely diluted urine, increased fluid intake and thirst. It should not be confused with diabetes mellitus ('sugar' diabetes), which is a completely different condition. There are two major forms of diabetes insipidus, namely *central diabetes insipidus* and *nephrogenic diabetes insipidus*.

- **Causes of central diabetes insipidus**

- In some patients, a part of the brain (called the hypothalamus) does not make enough of the antidiuretic hormone (ADH), which helps your body balance water in the urine and blood.
- In other patients, the kidneys do not work with this hormone in the way that they should. Most people with diabetes insipidus get it after an injury to the head or after brain surgery.
- In some instances, doctors cannot identify the cause (approximately 30% to 50% of cases).

- **Causes of nephrogenic diabetes insipidus**

- Heredity
- Medication, like lithium

How do you test for diabetes insipidus?

Usually your doctor will check your urine to see how much water and soluble substances it contains. Your doctor may also check your blood and give you a 'water deprivation' test. During this test, you are not allowed to drink any liquids. Medical staff will weigh you and check your urine and blood every hour for several hours. If the results of the test show that you have diabetes insipidus, you may have pictures taken of your brain with a computed tomography (CT) or a magnetic resonance image (MRI) scan to identify any problems.

Treatment of diabetes insipidus

If the symptoms do not bother you, you need not take any action. However, your doctor may want to check up on you more often. You should ensure that you always have something to drink to avoid getting dehydrated.

- **Central diabetes insipidus**

If you need to get up often at night to urinate, you may consider taking desmopressin (DDAVP), a medication that treats this problem. This acts as your body's natural ADH. This medication is available as a nasal spray, but also in other forms. If you take DDAVP, you should not drink too much, as your body may become 'overloaded' with fluid, which may cause you to feel sick, weak or dizzy.

- **Nephrogenic diabetes insipidus**

If your diabetes insipidus is caused by your kidneys not working well with the ADH, DDAVP will not help. Other medication, like hydrochlorothiazide (a water pill), may help in this case. Water pills help your body balance salt and water.

Discuss treatment options with your doctor to find out which one will work best for you.

References

2. FamilyDoctor.org-Diabetes Insipidus: <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/diabetes-insipidus.html>
1. UpToDate patient information: <http://www.uptodate.com/contents/table-of-contents/patient-information>

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