Yom Kippur & diabetes

For health professionals:

The Jewish community in the ACT is diverse, dynamic and growing. In 2011, 675 people in the ACT (0.2% of the population) identified as Jewish. This increased by 18% from 2006. Around half of Jewish people in the ACT were born in Australia. The next most common birthplaces were Israel (11%), England (8%), United States of America (8%), South Africa (3%), Hungary (2%) and Russia (2%).

Yom Kippur is one of the holiest days of the year for Jewish people around the world. The dates of Yom Kippur are based on the Jewish calendar and change each calendar year. In 2014, Yom Kippur falls on Saturday 4 October (Note: Jewish holidays begin at sundown the day before the date of the holiday).

During Yom Kippur, many Jewish people fast (i.e., abstain from food, water and non-essential medicines) from before sunset on the day before Yom Kippur, to after sunset on the day of Yom Kippur. The fasting period lasts approximately 25 hours. The fast is usually preceded and followed by a special shared meal.

While certain groups are not expected to fast (e.g., young children, elderly people, pregnant and nursing women, and people who are ill or who could become ill as a result of fasting), some people with ongoing health conditions choose to fast on Yom Kippur. Fasting may affect the management of several health conditions, including diabetes.

In 2009-10, 7% of the ACT population was ever diagnosed with diabetes or high blood glucose. However, evidence suggests that for every person diagnosed with diabetes in the community there is one undiagnosed person, suggesting a true prevalence of around 13%.

People with diabetes may have different physiological responses to fasting during Yom Kippur, depending on the type of diabetes and how it is usually managed (e.g., with insulin, other medicines such as metformin, or diet). The most common complications are hypoglycaemia, hyperglycaemia, diabetic ketoacidosis, and dehydration and thrombosis.

Before the fast of Yom Kippur begins, health professionals should learn about how their Jewish patients observe Yom Kippur, as practices may differ significantly between individuals, and be able to offer guidance on how to best manage diabetes, and other health conditions, during this period. Potential changes to patients’ usual practices, such as consuming a high-protein, low-carbohydrate meal with plenty of vegetables when breaking the fast, can be considered and discussed with individual patients.

Jewish patients may see fasting during Yom Kippur as an important religious and spiritual duty, and their choices should be treated with respect and sensitivity.

The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) provides interpreting services in over 160 languages. Interpreters are available on-site or by telephone by phoning 131 450.
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References


