

Double Twist and Mix Up Dance Groups
at the Ilford Super Roadshow 2010.
Photo: © Diabetes UK



Diabetes UK embraces dance

Andy James, Fundraising and Communications Director at Diabetes UK outlines how the national charity sees participation in dance as a route to help prevent and educate about diabetes

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is one of the biggest health challenges facing the UK today, one person is diagnosed with the condition every three minutes in this country. There are 2.5 million people in the UK with diabetes and a further half a million people living with the condition but don't know it. On average a person can live with Type 2 diabetes for ten years before being diagnosed.

Diabetes UK is the leading charity for the three million people in the UK with diabetes. Our mission is to improve the lives of people with the condition and to work towards a future without diabetes.

There are two versions of diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2.

Type 1 diabetes develops if the body is unable to produce any insulin. It accounts for about 10 per cent of all cases of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is not preventable.

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body still makes some insulin, but not enough, or when the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance). In most cases this is linked with being overweight.

When diabetes is not managed correctly, it can lead to complications including heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness and amputation. The complications of diabetes kill more people yearly than bowel and prostate cancer combined.



Dundee Super Roadshow 2010, featuring Scottish Dance Theatre. Photo: © Diabetes UK

Diabetes UK

Although diabetes is a serious condition, when managed well, people with diabetes can live healthy and active lives and Diabetes UK supports people with diabetes to do this.

The charity operates across the four nations, with offices in London, Cardiff, Glasgow and Belfast, as well as seven regional offices in England. We also have 400 voluntary groups across the UK providing support and resources for people with diabetes.

Diabetes UK supports people who have diabetes by campaigning and lobbying for better care, providing education and information and funding research. As well as people with diabetes, we reach out to healthcare professionals and those at risk.

Roadshows

Since 2006, Diabetes UK has run its roadshow programme, raising awareness of the risk factors of Type 2 diabetes and encouraging people at risk to take steps to reduce their risk. The roadshow is a bright magenta van that visits towns and villages across the UK providing information on diabetes and assessing people's risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

The following are risk factors of Type 2 diabetes and anyone with two or more of these should visit their GP for a diabetes test:

- Waist measurement of 37 inches or more for men (35 inches or more for men of South Asian origin) 31.5 inches or more for all women
- Being overweight
- Being aged over 40 (or 25 for people of Black and South Asian origin)
- Having a family history of Type 2 diabetes.

The cost of diabetes

It is currently estimated that 10 per cent of the NHS budget is spent on diabetes (around £9 billion a year.) It is possible to reduce the number of people developing Type 2 diabetes and the associated cost to the NHS, through improved education and awareness of the known risk factors. It is through this roadshow programme that Diabetes UK aims to raise awareness of Type 2 diabetes and prevent a diabetes epidemic.

Diabetes and dance

In recent years, we have seen a significant growth in the number of people who are obese in the UK. If we can reduce the number of overweight people, we can significantly reduce the number of people who develop Type 2 diabetes and therefore improve the health of the nation.

To do this Diabetes UK has developed two clear messages which people can easily understand around healthy eating and increasing physical activity.

We chose dance as the vehicle for getting people to move more and to encourage a healthy lifestyle. The

rationale behind this choice is simple: dance is inclusive, totally accessible and positively celebrates diversity. It is also fun.

Dance is growing faster than any other art-form in the UK. Around 4.6 million people take part in community dance with over 13% of the population now attending dance performances. The variety of different forms it offers is unparalleled.

We want to tap into this diverse and exciting world and increase the numbers getting involved in dance, as a way of keeping in shape and thus reducing the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Super Roadshows

This summer, five super Roadshows were held in Dundee, Nottingham, Staines, Ilford and Bexley. These roadshows carried out the usual risk assessments and provided information, but also had a healthy eating element, in the form of a 'kitchen' handing out free healthy food samples and hosting healthy eating games.

Each roadshow had a dance element, which saw one or more local dance group giving a series of performances outside the roadshow. The performances were a great success, some were interactive, and all attracted large crowds. The dance groups were given a great opportunity to promote their local performances and classes and encourage people to take up dancing as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Scottish Dance Theatre (SDT), Scotland's national contemporary dance company, performed two pieces from current works at the first Super Roadshow, in Dundee. Katie Smith, Marketing Manager at SDT said:

'Performing at the Diabetes UK roadshow was a fantastic way for SDT to promote our performances to a wide audience. The dancers had great fun performing and chatting to passers by about Scottish Dance Theatre and the importance of keeping active and healthy. We fully support Diabetes UK's efforts to get people moving through dance and look forward to any opportunity to work together again in the future.'

Results

Overall, the Super Roadshows saw an average increase of double the number of risk assessments and treble the amount of materials distributed than a normal roadshow. This is proof that dance works on a number of levels to engage audiences, spread the message about the importance of healthy lifestyle and act as a fun vehicle to spread healthy lifestyle and Type 2 diabetes prevention messages.

Plans for 2011

In 2011, we plan to run 50 Super Roadshows across the UK, each including dance. Keep up to date with the latest information, opportunities for recruitment and all other diabetes related information at www.diabetes.org.uk