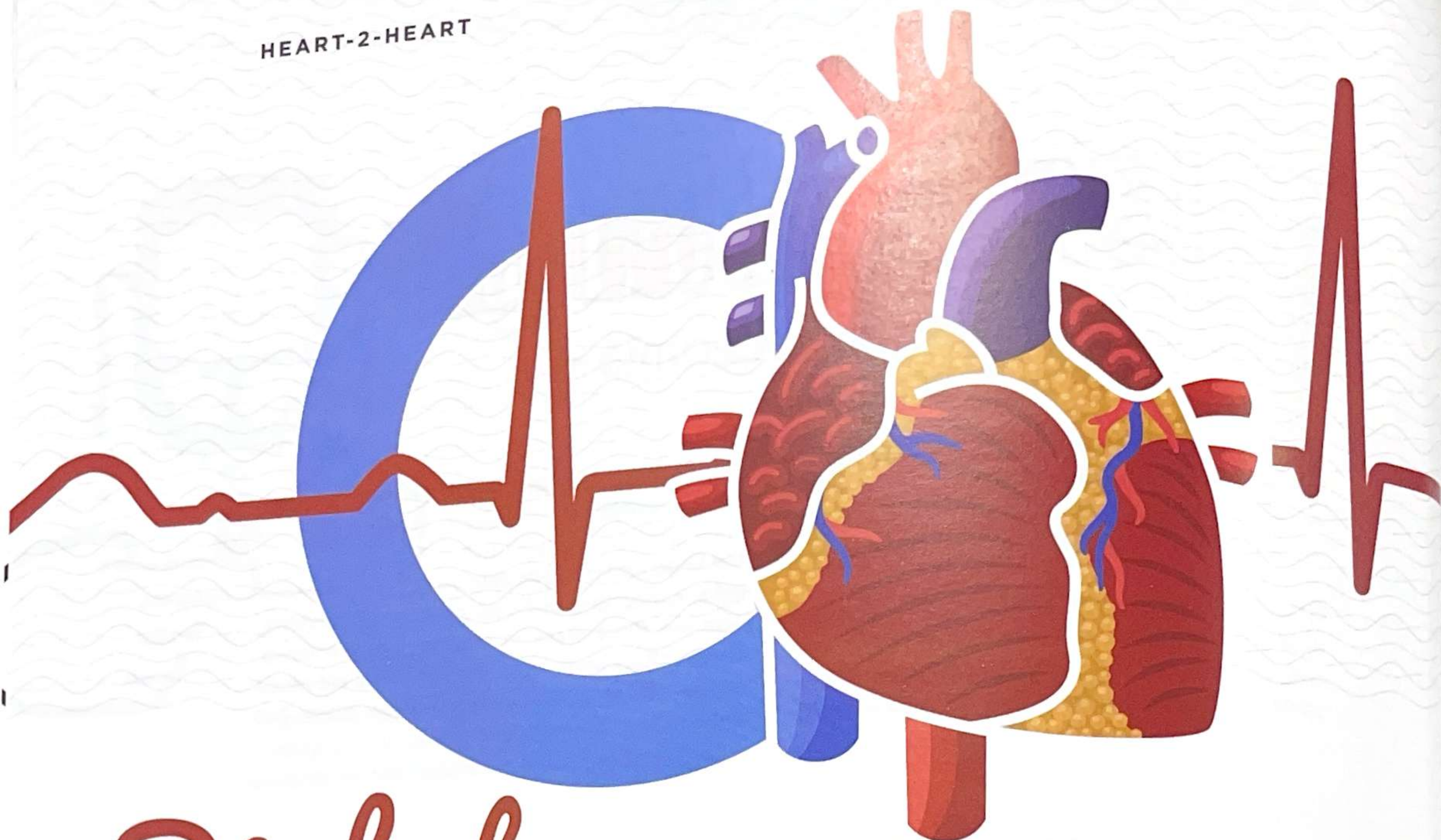




Diabetes and your Heart

Having diabetes greatly increases your risk of heart disease.

The Connection

Diabetes is closely related to Cardiovascular Disease (CVD). The three most common risk factors are diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol; in addition to smoking, inactivity, being overweight, a family history of heart disease and ageing also can contribute to CVD.

When one has diabetes, his risk of getting a cardiovascular event upon diagnosis is up to 3.7 times higher than a normal person. If he has established long standing diabetes, the risk is even higher – about five times higher compared to those without diabetes. In simple terms, when you have diabetes, it's as though you have suffered a heart attack. Our IJN patient

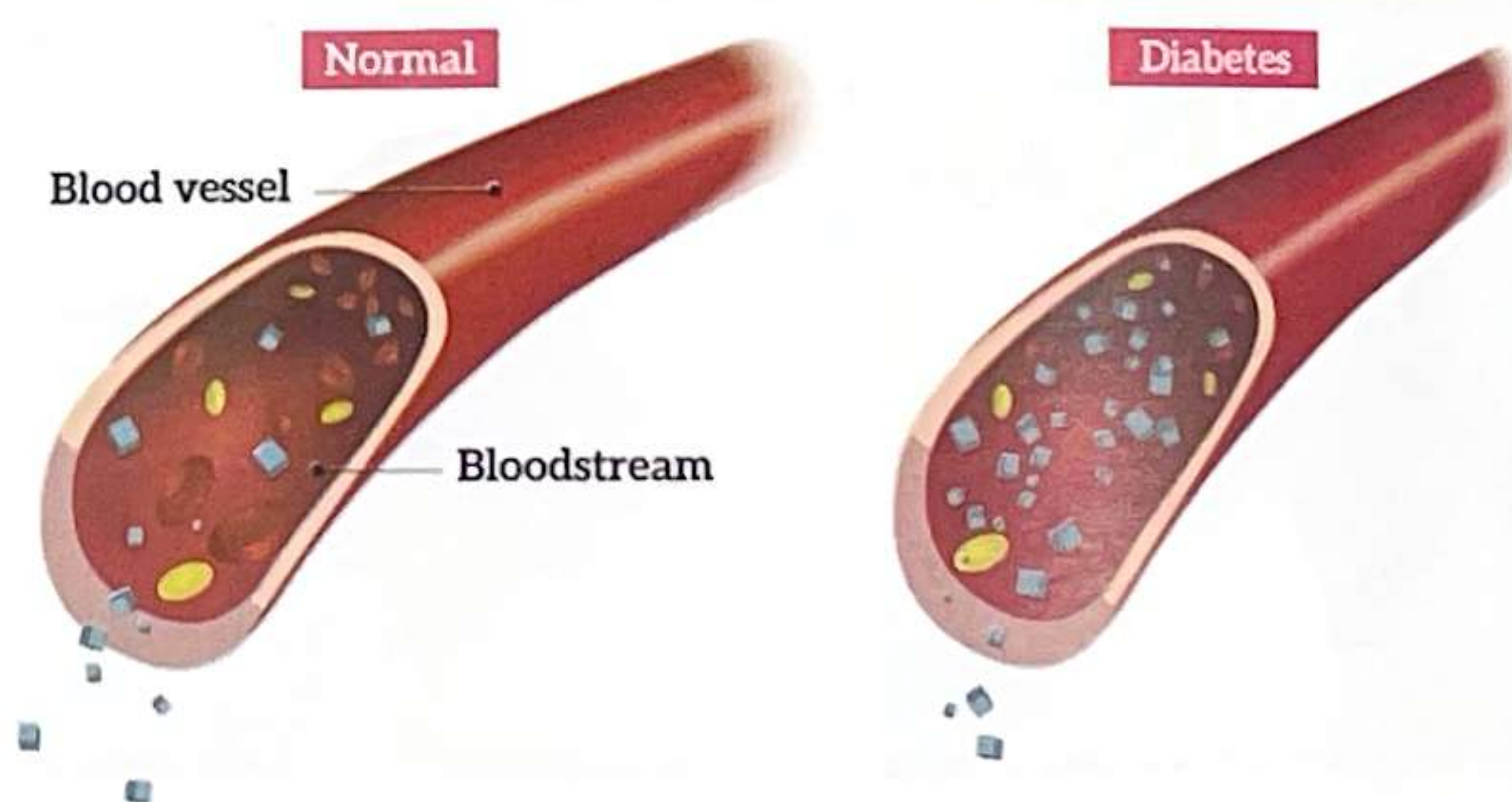


Dato' Sri Dr Azhari Rosman,
Senior Consultant Cardiologist

registry for heart disease reveals that about 50% of those who have had angioplasty are actually diabetic.

How Diabetes Affects the Blood Vessels

According to Dr Azhari Rosman, diabetes affects the blood vessels in two ways. First, the high level of insulin circulating in the body is damaging to the blood vessels as it promotes inflammation and many types of harmful blood vessel changes. Secondly, the elevated level of sugar in the bloodstream also damages the blood vessels, kidneys and heart muscle.



Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas that allows cells to use sugar from the food that you eat, for energy or storage. People with diabetes have insulin resistance whereby cells throughout their bodies are unable to use insulin effectively, causing excess sugar to build up in their blood. This blood sugar level is indicated in your blood test and detected in urine.

Obesity is a major factor that contributes to insulin resistance. When you are overweight or obese, your cells become less sensitive to insulin. The lack of glucose uptake by the cells makes the body think that there is not enough insulin, so it produces more and

more insulin. In the long run, the pancreas becomes worn-out and the high insulin levels damage organs.

To preserve the function of the pancreas, people with diabetes are starting insulin treatment earlier. Over time, more patient with diabetes will require insulin injections because the pancreas ultimately gets burnt out. But if you take insulin injections earlier, diabetes control is better, and you will also preserve your pancreas longer, which means you will not need so much medication to control your diabetes later. Nevertheless, lifestyle changes such as weight loss, exercise and diet are always important.

Diabetes is NOT the end of the world

Dr Azhari notes that today, despite patients having easy access to a lot of information about diabetes in print, and via the internet and assistance provided by the hospitals, maintaining good control of diabetes continues to remain a challenge. "This is mainly because patients are still hesitant to confront diabetes as a disease, even though many of them are already seeing their doctors due to heart disease. A common mind set among Asians is that being diagnosed with diabetes is 'the end of the world'. So, they will go to all lengths to deny that they have the disease, including not taking the medications prescribed.

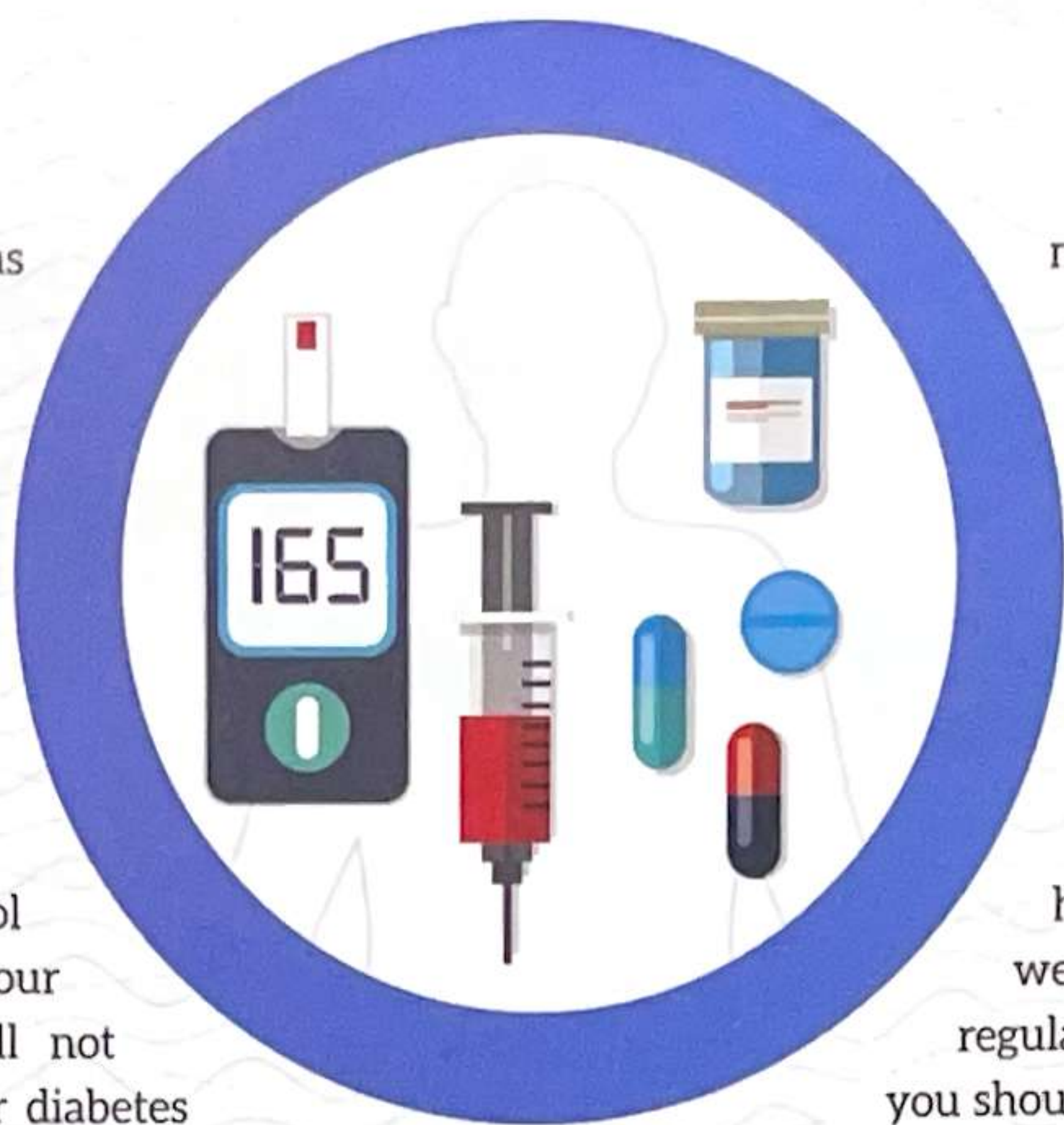
"In actual fact, diabetes is a very treatable disease. If you treat it early and control your sugar level well, you can prevent a lot of complications and live a healthy, quality life like everybody else. You can still enjoy your favourite foods – just make sure that you eat in smaller and sensible amounts."

He adds that many also like to turn to traditional treatment rather than proper medical treatment. "Some herbs are actually harmful to the kidneys. Ultimately it is the patients who decide what they want to take, but they should always let their doctors know. Some supplements are fine to take but not as a replacement to medical therapy.

"To achieve good control of diabetes, the most important factor is the initiative of the patient. Once diabetes affects the organs, blood vessels and feet, it becomes more difficult to treat. It is alarming and disheartening that in today's age, there are still people who refuse to take their medication. It is these people who will ultimately die of CAD or kidney failure and they die young. Awareness about diabetes is not enough. The patient must take the initiative to follow through the treatment prescribed."

Anyone can get diabetes and prevention is the key

According to Dr Azhari, the hospital is seeing more and more women and also younger people as diabetics. "Do not think that diabetes can only happen to older people. The notion that pre-menopausal women are protected from heart disease (CAD) by their hormones



no longer holds true anymore. In fact, the youngest patient who had bypass surgery in IJN is 28 years old, and she is diabetic.

"Basically, people who smoke, are overweight or obese, have a family history of diabetes, have a sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy dietary habits, are at an increased risk of diabetes. To lower your risk, you need to maintain a healthy lifestyle, a balanced diet, proper weight, do adequate amounts of exercise regularly and abstain from smoking. In addition, you should do a blood test and blood pressure check every year after the age of 30 years. Those with more risk factors should check their blood and blood pressure even earlier and take extra precautions. To check if you may be having prediabetes, you can also go for tests like the oral Glucose Tolerance Test (GTT), which sees how your body responds to a sugar load.

"Preventing yourself from becoming overweight or obese is highly important as obesity predisposes you to developing hypertension and diabetes, both of which are major factors of CVD. In fact, hypertension is more common than diabetes and is a silent killer due to the lack of symptoms. Statistics show that, nationwide, among people who present with heart problems, 43% are diabetic, and 74% are hypertensive," he notes.



For more information or appointment, please contact our Diabetes Educator at Diabetic Clinic +603-2617 8755.