Managing diabetes in people with dementia: a realist review

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Plain English summary

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Both dementia and diabetes mellitus are common in older people and many people may be living with both conditions. People living with dementia can find it more difficult to manage their diabetes. They are at increased risk of diabetes-related problems such as low blood sugar. Family members often help them to manage their diabetes.

In this study, evidence about the management of diabetes in people living with dementia was reviewed to find out what might work, how, why and in what contexts. Engaging with stakeholders throughout, we developed an initial ‘theory’ or idea about how interventions for people living with both dementia and diabetes should work. This idea was then tested and refined through a structured search for evidence. We then went back to the stakeholders to test out the findings of the review and refine them further.

The findings from this study indicate that services for people living with dementia and diabetes need to consider the following points.

- Self-management support for people with dementia and diabetes should focus on abilities and building confidence; the involvement of family carers is key.
- Health-care professionals need to have the skills to provide care that is tailored to the needs and priorities of the people with dementia and diabetes.
- Regular contact with a supportive health-care professional is likely to improve management of diabetes in people with dementia and can help to identify if they are having problems managing their diabetes.
- Family carers are likely to be involved in care and may need support and diabetes-related education. Further research in this area needs to look at how services can better fit with the needs of people with dementia and diabetes and their family carers.
- Technology needs to be tailored to the needs of people with dementia and their family carers, for example by promoting independence.
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