



Suffering From A Chronic Illness? You Can Still Get Insurance!

A pre-existing condition such as diabetes or hypertension could impact the purchase or renewal of a regular health insurance plan. But a specific health cover can bail you out, explains **Priya Nair**

Minakshi Sharma, a 48-year-old housewife from Delhi, has been suffering from diabetes for the past decade. For most of that time her sugar levels and medications have only increased. But over the last few months Sharma's sugar levels have shown an encouraging dip, and her doctor has reduced the dosage of her medicines. All this thanks to the monitoring app her health insurer gave her.

When she was first diagnosed with diabetes, Sharma had been advised by her doctor to follow a certain diet and exercise plan. But try as she might, she was not able to stick to it. Then two years ago she purchased Apollo Munich Health

Insurance's Energy Insurance Plan, a diabetes-specific health policy. As part of the insurance, she was initially given an app, which helped her monitor her food intake on a real-time basis. She used the app for few months. Also, Apollo Munich's wellness portal, myapollomunich.com, enabled her to manage health goals with the help of a health coach.

"Using the app, I used to log what I ate during the day and I got to know the nutritional value of each food. It also told me the quantity of various food items I should be consuming. For instance, 50 per cent of my diet should comprise vegetables, either cooked or raw such as salad, about 25 per cent should be carbohydrates, and so on," she says.

The policy includes two free health checkups a year. Sharma gets reminders from the insurance company and her results are monitored too. This helps her contain the illness and manage it better. She's also able to get a discount on the premiums as her blood sugar levels are better now.

"I spend about ₹2000-3000 per month on my medicines and glucometer strips. If it weren't for the app and the constant monitoring of my food intake and exercise, my sugar levels would not have been under control," she says.

A Tough Call for Diabetics

It is not easy for diabetics to get health insurance. In case of

hospitalisation, diabetics may be required to spend 10-15 per cent more time in hospital for their treatment than regular patients. Besides, chances of complications tend to be higher when diabetes is involved. These are some reasons why patients find it difficult to get insurance cover, says Dr Rajiv Kovil, Medical Director, Dr Kovil Diabetic Centre, and consultant with Nanavati and SL Raheja Hospitals in Mumbai. "Today, diabetics just do not get insurance. Even if they do, the coverage will start only three to four years after getting insured. So people try to mask their diabetic status while taking insurance. But this does not help the insurance company or the patient. When the patient gets admitted to hospital doctors write everything in the report. And that does not help the patient at the time of claims. It is high time insurance companies provide cover based on the risk factor and charge a higher premium based on that," says Dr Kovil.

Policies for chronic illnesses are costlier

Sum Insured – ₹10 lakh, Age – 45 years
Price-annualised premium inclusive of taxes

Apollo Munich's Energy		
Variant	With 20% Co-pay	Without Co-pay
Silver	₹20,521	₹25,623
Gold	₹26,074	₹31,176

Apollo Munich's Optima Restore Individual	
₹12,724	

Source: Company

The Downside of Data Limitation

By and large it's true that relative to healthier individuals it is difficult for diabetics to get insurance cover, admits Antony Jacob, CEO, Apollo Munich Health Insurance. Other than the perception that diabetics are worse off in health than healthy individuals – and the associated complications that could arise in the long run – another reason is data limitation.

"Companies want to offer insurance to diabetics because

Star Diabetes Safe	
Variant	₹
Plan A (offline)	₹25,565
Plan B (online plan)*	₹34,834

* offers discounts on services which is not available in offline plan

Star Comprehensive Plan	
₹13,895	

Source: Company

they are a huge population. India is the diabetic capital of the world. But somehow longitudinal data is absent – that is, credible studies on



Pradeep Malhotra, 56 years

Plan-Apollo Energy Health Insurance -Gold

Policy issued-January 2014

Sum assured ₹10 lakh

Annual Premium ₹47,506.65



Minakshi Sharma, 48 years,

Plan-Apollo Energy Health Insurance -Silver

Policy-February 2016

Sum assured ₹3 lakh

Annual Premium ₹17,318

reasonably large populations over a period of 10, 15, or 20 years. So that is a big limitation. If that kind of data were available it would be possible to price the product more accurately, which is difficult in India. Pricing actuarial science operates a lot on data, so we have some limitation on data as well," Jacob explains.

Paying a Higher Premium

According to Dr S Prakash, COO, Star Health and Allied Insurance, insurance companies will not refuse insurance cover to a diabetic person solely for that reason. "Diabetics can get insurance but the insurance company may charge an extra premium if it is known that the individual is a diabetic on a long-term basis and under treatment. The amount of premium on account of diabetes will vary from company to company. Uncomplicated diabetes will not be refused insurance cover. But diabetics with target organ damage may be refused insurance cover," he says.

The higher premium for diabetics could be in the range of 10-20 per cent. In most cases the cover is available only for Type 2 diabetes, says Kapil Mehta, co-founder and CEO, SecureNow Insurance Broker. "If you look at the rejection rate of people who apply for health insurance, the biggest reasons are diabetes and hypertension. Unfortunately, most companies do not offer plans for those suffering from Type 1 diabetes. Such persons have no option but to take group insurance," he says.

Pooja Malhotra from Delhi is only too aware of this. A diabetic herself, she was refused a plan from Apollo. But her husband Pradeep Malhotra, who is 56 and suffering from high BP, is a customer of the Apollo Energy plan. "My husband has been taking medicines for BP for the last few years. The policy ensured that he continued with his diet and exercise routine. We get regular calls from

Features of Diabetes-specific Plans

Apollo Munich's Energy Health Insurance Plan

- Offers coverage only to those suffering from Type 2 diabetes
- Medical checkup is mandatory before purchasing the policy
- Two variants offered – Gold (cost of wellness test included) and Silver (cost of wellness test excluded), both available with/without the co-payment option of 20 per cent
- Offers a Stay Healthy programme, which includes online health assessment, customised diet and exercise plan, discounts on health products and services, alerts on doctor's appointments and medicine intake
- Offers discounts based on whether the customer attends regular checkups, is controlling BP, BMI, sugar level, etc. Customers earn points based on these parameters. The points can be used for getting discounts on the renewal premium or for OPD expenses and at pharmacies
- Every customer is assigned a health coach, who is a certified diabetes educator. The health coach publishes a calendar with details of diet, exercise, etc to be followed

Star Health's Diabetes Safe Insurance

- Covers both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, other than complications of diabetes
- Two versions available; version one requires a medical test where complications arising out of diabetes is covered from day one
- The other version involves a 15-month waiting period
- Includes coverage for artificial limbs due to amputation, donor transplant, and expenses for diagnostics and consultation
- Compensation for accidental death of the insured person
- Automatic restoration of entire sum insured

the company to remind us of his checkups. We also get discounts on the premium since his BP is under control. That's the biggest attraction. The checkups are free and we have to pay only if we want a physical copy of the report," she says.

Diabetes-specific Insurance Plans

These are specialised insurance plans providing coverage for treatments or expenses for people who suffer from diabetes. These could be standalone plans specifically covering the disease, or part of a regular health insurance policy after paying extra premium. Varistha Mediclaim from National Insurance and Care Freedom from Religare Health Insurance are two such plans, but they cater only to senior citizens, says Mehta.

However, 'Diabetes Safe' from Star Health Insurance and 'Energy' from Apollo Munich Health Insurance are two exclusive diabetes insurance plans that anyone in the eligible age bracket can buy. The advantages of these two plans are that any diabetic patient aged between 18 and 65 is eligible and there's no waiting period. Coverage for diabetes and hypertension is offered from day one.

To Buy or Not To Buy

If you already have a health insurance policy and have finished the waiting period for pre-existing diseases (which could go up to four years) you need not buy a diabetes-specific cover. Your existing policy will meet all your needs. But if you are suffering from diabetes and don't have any health insurance cover, such a plan could be suitable for you.

These plans are about 30 per cent more expensive than a regular health plan and often have restrictions such as the amount of waiting period for specific ailments. But at least the person will have a health insurance policy, says Mehta. □

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