

TAKE STEPS TO MANAGE YOUR DIABETES

Although diabetes can't be cured, you can still live a long and healthy life. The single most important thing you can do is control your blood sugar level. You can do this by eating right, exercising, maintaining a healthy weight and, if needed, taking oral medicines or insulin.

WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes is a disease that occurs when a person's body doesn't make enough of the hormone insulin or can't use insulin properly. There are 2 types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes occurs when your body's pancreas doesn't produce any insulin. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas either doesn't produce enough insulin or your body's cells ignore the insulin.

MOVING TOWARDS HEALTH—DIABETES AND EXERCISE

Exercise can help control your weight and lower your blood sugar level. It also lowers your risk of heart disease, a condition that is common in people who have diabetes.

What kind of exercise should I do?

Talk to your family doctor about what kind of exercise is right for you. The type of exercise you can do will mainly depend on whether you have any other health problems. Most doctors recommend aerobic exercise, which makes you breathe more deeply and makes your heart work harder. Examples of aerobic exercise include walking, jogging, aerobic dance or bicycling.

Are there any risks to exercising for people who have diabetes?

Yes, but the benefits far outweigh the risks. Regular exercise makes your body more sensitive to insulin, and your blood sugar level may (over)

KEEPING THE BALANCE—DIABETES AND NUTRITION

What you eat is closely connected to the amount of sugar in your blood. The right food choices will help you control your blood sugar level.



Do I have to follow a special diet?

There isn't one specific "diabetes diet." Your family doctor will probably suggest that you work with a registered dietitian to design a meal plan. A meal plan is a guide that tells you what kinds of food to eat at meals and for snacks. For most people who have diabetes (and those without, too), a healthy diet consists of 40% to 60% of calories from carbohydrates, 20% from protein and 30% or less from fat. It should be low in cholesterol, low in salt and low in added sugar. Choose a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and fish.

Can I eat any sugar?

Yes. In recent years, doctors have learned that eating some sugar doesn't usually cause problems for most people who have diabetes—as long as it is part of a balanced diet. Just be careful about how much sugar you eat and try not to add sugar to foods.

get too low (called hypoglycemia) after exercising. You may need to check your blood sugar level before and after exercising. Your doctor can tell you what your blood sugar level should be before and after exercise.

Exercise checklist for people who have diabetes

- ✓ **Talk** to your family doctor about the right exercise for you.
- ✓ **Check** your blood sugar level before and after exercising.
- ✓ **Check** your feet for blisters or sores before and after exercising.
- ✓ **Wear** the proper shoes and socks.
- ✓ **Drink** plenty of fluid before, during and after exercising.
- ✓ **Warm up** before exercising and cool down afterward.
- ✓ **Have** a snack handy in case your blood sugar level drops too low.



HELPING A FAMILY MEMBER WHO HAS DIABETES

It isn't easy for people to hear that they have diabetes. Diabetes is a disease that cannot be cured. It has to be taken care of every day. There are ways to help your loved one who has diabetes.

How can I help my relative who has diabetes?

First, learn all you can about diabetes. The more you know, the more you can help. Encourage your relative to learn about diabetes, also. Second, be sympathetic. It can be scary at first for people to find out they have diabetes. Tell your relative that you understand how he or she feels. But don't let your relative use these feelings as an excuse for not taking care of his or her diabetes.

How can I help my relative make healthy changes?

If you eat meals together, eat the same foods your relative eats. Avoid buying foods he or she isn't supposed to eat. People who have diabetes should generally follow the same advice for healthy eating as everyone else: Eat foods that are low in fat, cholesterol, salt and added sugar. Encourage exercise. You might even want to exercise together.

What else can I do?

Learn how to recognize signs of problems. Learn the symptoms of a high blood sugar level (called hyperglycemia) and a low blood sugar level (called hypoglycemia). Understand that when your relative is very cranky or has a bad temper, his or her blood sugar level may be too high or too low. Rather than arguing, encourage your relative to check the blood sugar level and take steps to correct the problem.

REFERENCES

All information sourced from FamilyDoctor.org, a resource operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)