

Diabetes and Your Lifestyle

Most people with diabetes live full lives. Diabetes does not have to stand in the way. But, diabetes affects your way of life, such as how you eat and keep fit. It can also affect work and sex. Here are some tips for how to stay healthy and live well with diabetes. These tips may be helpful for patients and families.

Exercise

Exercise is good for your health! It is never too late to start getting fit. There are a lot of good things about exercise. Exercise helps your heart and lowers your blood pressure. It helps your body fight disease, helps you lose weight, and keeps your spirits up. Keeping fit is good for your diabetes. Your body's insulin use is better if you keep fit. You might need less medicine to control your blood sugar.

When you exercise, watch your blood sugar to make sure it does not go too low. You will need to balance your medicine and food. Plan the amount and the timing of your food and exercise. If you take insulin, you may need to take less when you exercise. You may need to eat more when you exercise so your blood sugar does not go low.

It can seem hard to start exercising. Many people feel this way. Here are some things you can do to make it easier to get started:

- Exercise a little bit at a time.
- Set a goal you can reach.
- Pick an exercise you like.

One good way to start exercising is to try walking. All you need to start walking is a good pair of walking shoes. If you have not exercised in a while, check with your doctor first. Start slowly and build up little by little as you get stronger.

Some exercises get the heart beating strong and fast. These are called "aerobic". You can walk, run, swim, bike, or dance for aerobic exercise.

Some people should talk to their doctors before starting. Check with your doctor first if:

- You are at risk for heart problems.
- You are older than 50.
- You do not usually exercise.

Exercise can change your blood sugar. Test your blood sugar before and after you work out. Over time you will learn how it affects your blood sugar. It is important that your heart does not beat too fast when you work out. Your doctor will help you figure out how fast your heart should beat when you work out.

Traveling

When you travel, be sure to have your supplies with you at all times. Make sure you can get to your supplies at all times. For example, do not put them in your checked luggage. You do not want your insulin to end up in Utah if you go to Maine! You may want to pack two sets of supplies. Keep one set with you, and put one set in your luggage.

In your travel supply kit, be sure to include:

- Your diabetes medicine (such as pills or insulin)
- Supplies for taking your medicine (such as needles or your pen for taking insulin)
- Your blood sugar monitor for checking your blood sugar
- Supplies for your monitor (test strips, the lancet device for pricking yourself, a replacement battery for your meter)
- Your Glucagon Kit if you use insulin.

Make sure you have some food with sugar with you in case your blood sugar gets too low. This is very important on car trips when you are driving. If you drive:

- Test your blood sugar before you start driving.
- Test your blood sugar every 2 hours during the trip.
- Eat some carbohydrates at the first signs of a low.

Employment and diabetes

You can find people with diabetes in all walks of life. Having diabetes should not stop you from doing most types of work. Employers cannot bar you from most types of work. But, it is up to you to keep your diabetes under control. This will help you perform on the job in the way that is expected of you.

It is not legal to ban you from a job because of diabetes. This is part of the “Americans with Disabilities Act.” But, there are special cases. People with type 1 diabetes are not allowed to do some jobs. This is for the safety of others. One such job is airplane pilot. Local police units may not hire people with diabetes.

You do not have to tell your employer you have diabetes. But, if asked, it is best to tell the truth. At least 1 person who works with you should know you have diabetes. This can be helpful if you have low blood sugar at work. Some jobs have unusual hours or keep you on the go. You may need special plans to make sure you eat your meals at consistent times.

Diabetes and sexuality

Diabetes can affect your sex life. Diabetes lasts the rest of your life, and it affects your body. But it can also affect how you feel, think and relate to others.

Poor control of blood sugar leads to health problems. These health problems can get in the way of your sex life.

For women, diabetes can cause:

- dry vagina
- yeast infections
- menstrual periods that are not regular

These can get better with good control of blood sugar. Many couples find that products you can buy for dryness (called “supplemental lubricants”) help. For some women, nerve disease (called “neuropathy”) can take some of the pleasure out of sex.

For men, diabetes can make it hard to get an erection (called “impotence” or “erectile dysfunction”). It can affect the blood flow and nerves that play a part in an erection. Diabetes can affect how you feel. Feeling sad/blue or nervous/worried can affect sex.

There are many treatments for men that help with erection. Talk with your doctor about what may be right for you. There are many medicines that you and your doctor can choose from. Medicine can be taken as pills, and others as shots. If these treatments do not work, then there are implants for the penis as well.

Special issues for older adults

Some people have diabetes for a long time. This makes them more likely to have health problems from diabetes. Some may not know they have diabetes. Often they think their symptoms are from other things. Some may think their need to urinate frequently is from fluid pills (called “diuretics”). Some may think their weight loss is from not eating well. Some do not see a doctor until after they have problems. Then the doctor may test their blood sugar and find they have diabetes.

You may have to change the way you have been doing some things for a very long time. For example, you may have to change how you eat or how you keep fit. If you take medicine, watch for low blood sugar. It can cause falls because of dizziness. It may be hard to take your medicine or test your blood sugar due to:

- poor vision
- trouble moving your fingers or hands
- feeling depressed
- being confused.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any of these problems. They can assist you with getting help.

*****Authored by Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Health System*****