

Managing Type 1 Diabetes in Your Child: Getting Started



Finding out that your child has diabetes can be scary. All the things you need to know may seem overwhelming. But you don't have to learn it all right away. You and your child can learn together.

Diabetes is a condition that happens when the pancreas can no longer make insulin. The body needs insulin to turn sugar (glucose) from food into energy. If the body doesn't have insulin, the level of sugar in the blood can get too high. Over time, high amounts of blood sugar can harm the body. Diabetes is a lifelong (chronic) disease. There is no cure. But there is treatment to help control it. So your child can lead a full, healthy life.

Building a team



In managing diabetes, you and your child will get the support of a healthcare team. Along with your child's healthcare provider, the team will help you and your child learn to control your child's blood sugar. Special healthcare providers on your child's diabetes care team may include:

- Endocrinologist, a healthcare provider who treats people with diabetes
- Diabetes educator, also known as a diabetes care and education specialist
- Dietitian
- Occupational therapist
- Health psychologist or social worker
- Dentist
- Eye care provider
- Exercise trainer
- School nurse
- Pharmacist
- Podiatrist

Controlling type 1 diabetes

To help control your child's type 1 diabetes, follow these tips. These can help your child's body keep healthy blood sugar levels.

- **Monitoring.** Your child's healthcare team will work with you. They'll help you set a blood sugar target range for your child. You'll also learn how and when to check blood sugar levels. This helps you watch if your child's blood sugar is in a healthy range.
- **Managing insulin.** The healthcare provider will give you a prescription for insulin for your child. You'll be shown how and when to give the insulin to your child.
- **Eating.** A dietitian will help you create a meal plan. You'll learn which foods are best for your child, and how much and how often they should eat.
- **Staying active.** Daily exercise can help lower your child's blood sugar level. Ask the provider about how to keep your child active. Work with a diabetes educator or exercise specialist. They can help you decide on the best activity or exercises for your child.

Learning to cope

Living with diabetes is a lifelong challenge. The more you learn, the more you'll be able to help your child build skills. But dealing with the details of managing diabetes is just 1 piece of the puzzle. You'll also be coping with your child's emotions. And with your own feelings and those of other family members.

- **Dealing with grief.** It isn't your fault that your child has diabetes. And it's not your child's fault. But you both may feel angry or guilty. You may also feel scared or sad. Or you both may want to deny what's happening. These feelings are normal. They're part of grieving for the losses that come with a chronic health condition. These feelings may come and go. But if you face them, they won't take over your life.
- **Staying positive.** Diabetes is a serious condition. But people with diabetes can have long, healthy, active lives. Your child doesn't need to stop playing sports, getting together with friends, or doing well in school. They can still have a family someday. Believe that your child can live well with diabetes. You'll help your child believe it, too.
- **Getting professional support.** A diabetes diagnosis can throw the entire family into a major crisis until education and fine-tuning insulin and blood sugar levels make the diagnosis feel manageable. If your child, you, your partner, or other children are having trouble coping, consider talking to a licensed clinical psychologist (PhD) or a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW). Your child's school may also have support services you can access. Sometimes talking a few times to a professional can improve your sense of well-being. Ask your diabetes team about referrals.
- **Educating school staff.** Ask your diabetes team how to deal with your child's school. Educating staff members will be important. And so will knowing your child's legal protections if accommodations are needed due to diabetes. Including the school is important in diabetes management. But you don't need to sort this out yourself. Your team will help you.
- **Helping your child learn to manage their diabetes.** As your child gets older, they'll need to take more responsibility for managing diabetes. This will require age-appropriate role adjustments as your child grows. Talk to your team about how to help your child slowly take more control over managing their diabetes.

To learn more

These groups provide information, educational programs, and other services. They are there to help you.

- [Association of Diabetes Educators & Education Specialists at www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org)
- [American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) or 800-342-2383
- [Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International at www.jdrf.org](http://www.jdrf.org) or 800-533-2873
- [National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse at www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov) or 800-860-8747
- [Endocrine Society at www.endocrine.org/topics/diabetes](http://www.endocrine.org/topics/diabetes) or 888-363-6274

- [American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

How daily issues affect your health

Many things in your daily life impact your health. This can include transportation, money problems, housing, access to food, and child care. If you can't get to medical appointments, you may not receive the care you need. When money is tight, it may be difficult to pay for medicines. And living far from a grocery store can make it hard to buy healthy food.

If you have concerns in any of these or other areas, talk with your healthcare team. They may know of local resources to assist you. Or they may have a staff person who can help.

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