

# For Kids Ages 12 to 17: Dealing with Diabetes



Your healthcare provider says that you have diabetes. It's a serious health problem that can make you feel sick if not treated. But you can learn how to live with diabetes and stay healthy. Make some changes in your life so diabetes doesn't stop you from doing the things you like to do. This sheet tells you some of the basics of coping with diabetes. You can talk to your healthcare team and go on the internet to learn more.

## You're not alone

Finding out that you have diabetes can be hard. But you don't have to face it alone. Lots of people will help you. Your diabetes team may include your parents, brothers and sisters, and your family healthcare provider. There are also some special team members who know a lot about diabetes. These people are:

- **Endocrinologist.** This is a medical doctor who treats children with diabetes.
- **Dietitian.** A dietitian teaches you about the best foods to eat. They can tell you how food affects your blood sugar.
- **Diabetes educator.** A diabetes educator is someone like a nurse, pharmacist, occupational therapist, or social worker. They teach you how to manage your blood sugar.
- **Occupational therapist.** This is a healthcare provider who can help you figure out how to do certain things now that you have diabetes. This could include playing sports and working.
- **Pediatrician or family healthcare provider.** This is a healthcare provider who takes care of any other health problems. They are often called a primary care physician.
- **Pharmacist.** This person fills the prescriptions for your diabetes medicines. They can answer any questions you have about your medicines. They can tell you how your medicines interact with food and other medicines.
- **Podiatrist.** This healthcare provider deals with any problems of the feet.
- **Dentist.** This healthcare provider makes sure your teeth are as healthy as they can be.
- **Ophthalmologist.** This healthcare provider makes sure your eyes are as healthy as they can be.
- **Mental health provider.** It can be hard to adjust to diabetes. A counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker can help you and your family cope.

## What's your role?

You may need some support from your family and your diabetes team. But you're probably ready to do some of your diabetes care yourself. This may include checking your blood sugar and giving yourself insulin shots. Talk to your parents and your healthcare provider. Tell them how involved you would like to be with your diabetes care. Don't take on everything at once. But the more of your diabetes management you do yourself, the more independent you can be. Just speak up if you feel overwhelmed. Bring a list of questions you have about your diabetes when you visit your healthcare providers. This will help you get the information you need to be in control of your health.



## Managing your blood sugar at school

Classes, sports, and other activities likely take up a lot of your time. Being busy at school can make managing your blood sugar harder to remember. No matter what, it's important to stick to your management plan:

- Before the school year starts, sit down with your parents, teachers, and school officials. Make sure they know your diabetes management plan. Know that you have the right to any help you need to manage your diabetes in any situation.
- Teachers and school officials will also need to know what to do in case you have low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) or high blood sugar (hyperglycemia). Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it. Always be sure to wear your medical ID. That way, people will know you have diabetes if you have an emergency.

## Being active

Like food and insulin, being active can help you manage your blood sugar. Activity, such as playing sports or riding a bike, can help keep your blood sugar from getting too high. But too much activity can sometimes make your blood sugar fall too low. That's why it's important to check your blood sugar more often when you are active. You may also need to adjust how much insulin you take when you are active. Your diabetes team can tell you how. **Don't** inject insulin into a muscle, like your leg, right before you start an activity, such as running or playing soccer. The insulin will absorb too quickly.

## Your friends can help

You don't have to talk about diabetes with anyone unless you want to. But you may find that telling your friends about your diabetes can help. Your true friends will support you. They can even learn the signs of low blood sugar. Then if you are acting "low," they can get an adult to help. But watch out for the "diabetes police." These

are people who criticize your food choices or nag you about your blood sugar. If you feel like other kids are judging you, talk to your parents or diabetes team about how to deal with them.

## **Risky behaviors**

You've heard it before: Alcohol, smoking, drugs, and unprotected sex can be bad for you. And it's true. But these things are even more dangerous when you have diabetes. You've been working hard to stay healthy. Alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs just mess that up. Unprotected sex can lead to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancy. Unplanned pregnancy can be very risky if you have diabetes. High blood sugar can harm an unborn baby. If you feel pressure to drink, smoke, do drugs, or have sex, talk to your diabetes team or your parents to get advice.

## **It's normal to have ups and downs**

There will be times when you feel on top of things. Other times, you may feel stressed out or tired of dealing with diabetes. When this happens, don't give up. Ask for help. Your diabetes team is there to help you find ways to make things easier. You don't have to be perfect. You can make changes to your plan and still be healthy. One way to help with stress is to join a diabetes support group. This group is made up of other kids your age with diabetes. They can understand what you're going through because they're going through it, too. Some places also have diabetes camps. Ask your diabetes team for information if a camp interests you.

## **To learn more**

For more information about diabetes, visit the [American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).

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