

# General Health Care

Taking extra good care of yourself is important when you have diabetes.

## Dental care

High blood sugar increases your risk for tooth and gum problems. To help prevent these problems, you should:

- Brush and floss every day.
- See your dentist at least every six months.
- Tell your dentist you have diabetes.



## Sexual dysfunction and diabetes

Sexual problems (sexual dysfunction) are common among people with diabetes, particularly in older men who have had diabetes for years. In addition, many medical experts believe that women with diabetes experience sexual difficulties as a result of complications from the disease.

People who experience sexual difficulties can lead more enjoyable, fulfilling sexual lives by learning about common causes and symptoms of sexual difficulties, treatment options, and how to talk about it with a health care provider or mate.

## Tips for foot care when you have diabetes

For people with diabetes, practicing proper foot care is an important step toward successful diabetes management. One in four people with diabetes will develop foot complications. Make foot care a part of your daily routine to avoid serious problems such as neuropathy, vascular disease and injury.

### Check

Check your feet in the morning and at night before you go to bed. Look for anything out of the ordinary, such as areas of redness, blisters or cuts. If you discover a wound, pay close attention to be sure it is healing properly. Report any problems to your health care provider.

### Protect

Wash your feet every day with mild soap in warm not hot water. Cut your toenails straight across, not into corners.

### Prevent

You can help prevent the risk of injury to your feet by selecting comfortable footwear. Wear socks and shoes.

### Consult

Take your shoes and socks off at every health care provider visit to remind your health care provider to check your feet. Patients with diabetes must have a foot exam at least once a year by a health care provider.

## Sick days

When you catch a cold or the flu your body will often react in a way that increases your blood sugars. This is why it is important to have a sick day plan in place.

### Sick day rules:

- Take your insulin or diabetes medications unless your health care provider gives you other instructions.
- Check your blood sugar before each meal and at bedtime.
- Check your urine for ketones if blood sugars are greater than 240 mg/dL.
- Follow your meal plan if you can eat. If you can't eat, you should try to take in at least 4 oz. of a sugar-containing beverage every hour to keep your blood sugar from falling too low.



### Call your health care provider when:

- You are vomiting and unable to keep down foods, liquids or your medicines.
- Your illness lasts longer than 24 hours.
- Ketones are present in your urine.
- All blood sugars are higher than 240 mg/dL for more than one day.

When the above symptoms occur, insist on speaking to your health care provider or nurse to let them know something is wrong. Remind your health care provider you are a diabetic.

### You are in control

The more you know about diabetes and act upon that knowledge, the healthier you can be. We hope that you'll make good use of this important information. This information will help you to manage your diabetes.

It is good to catch problems early. Tell your health care provider if you have any signs of nerve damage, skin problems or repeated infections.

High blood sugar levels can reduce the body's ability to fight off many kinds of infections, including the flu. Check with your health care provider about getting a yearly flu vaccine.

People with diabetes are more prone to developing:

- Skin infections
- Bladder infections
- Vaginal yeast infections
- Tooth and gum infections

## Managing Depression

With a chronic illness, you may be more likely to experience mood changes that affect your ability to manage your health. If you experience symptoms that last for at least two weeks or more, talk to your health care provider. Treatment is different for each person and your health care provider will talk with you about what might be best for you. Be sure to tell your health care provider about all medications you are taking, including supplements or over-the-counter medications.

Symptoms may include:

- Feeling hopeless, worthless or helpless.
- Feeling irritable or restless.
- No interest in activities or hobbies.
- Feeling tired or having less energy.
- Having difficulty with concentration or decision-making.
- Not being able to sleep or sleeping too much.
- Overeating.
- Having no appetite.
- Thinking of suicide or attempting suicide.

### Manage Stress

It is normal to feel anxious when you are diagnosed with a health condition, so try your best to keep your stress level in check. Stress causes your heart to work harder. Learn to recognize your stress triggers and symptoms. Develop ways to manage your stress. It may help to talk with family or friends.

Physical exercise helps your muscles. Relaxation exercises help your mental well-being. Consider trying yoga or tai chi.

Even with the best intentions and support, it's common for some people to develop symptoms of depression. A change in lifestyle, taking medicine and feelings of loss can be hard to deal with.

Sadness and irritability may occur from time to time, and this is normal. However, if these feelings happen every day for longer than two weeks, talk to your health care provider.



## Take advantage of all types of support that can help you feel your best.

Remember that you're not alone. You're part of a team committed to managing your diabetes. Never forget that diabetes is challenging. Celebrate your successes instead of striving for perfection. Keep track of your successes and work to repeat them. When things don't turn out the way you planned, ask yourself, "What can I learn from this?"

By learning and using your knowledge to meet each new challenge, you'll gain confidence in your ability to take care of yourself. One day, instead of simply coping with your diabetes, you'll find that you truly are managing your diabetes.

## When Someone You Care About Has Diabetes

### Ask what you can do

Find out what your loved one needs and ways you can help.

- Go along to the health care provider visit.
- Go walking or dancing with him/her.
- Watch out for other problems with diabetes, such as not seeing clearly, foot or skin problems, or depression.
- Talk about how you may feel so it can help both of you.
- Cook a good, healthy meal

If your family member gets very sick, you might be able to take time off from work to help. Ask your employer if you are covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

## Get Help

You don't have to do this alone. See if there is a diabetes support group where you live. Talk to the health care provider if your loved one has problems or gets depressed. You can also get help from these groups:

### Resources

Use these resources for more information about diabetes, including treatment, blood sugar monitoring and the importance of healthy living.

#### National organizations

- American Diabetes Association, [diabetes.org](https://diabetes.org), 1-800-DIABETES, 1-800-342-2383
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, [niddk.nih.gov](https://niddk.nih.gov)
- National Diabetes Education Program of the National Institutes of Health, [ndep.nih.gov](https://ndep.nih.gov), 1-800-860-8747
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [cdc.gov/diabetes](https://cdc.gov/diabetes)
- American Heart Association, [heart.org](https://heart.org)

## Your Diabetes Care Team

According to the American Diabetes Association, your diabetes care team should include:

**You:** You are the most important member of your diabetes care team. Only you know how you feel. Your diabetes care team will depend on you to talk to them honestly and supply information about your body.

Your provider may have you self-monitor your blood glucose (SMBG). It tells your health care providers whether your treatment is working.

**Primary health care provider:** Your primary care provider is the health care provider you see for general checkups and when you get sick. This person is usually an internist or family medicine health care provider who has experience treating people with diabetes.

**Endocrinologist:** An endocrinologist/diabetologist should also be seen regularly. An endocrinologist is a health care provider who has special training and experience in treating people with diabetes.

**Dietitian:** A registered dietitian is trained in the field of nutrition. Because food is a key part of your diabetes treatment, a dietitian is very important. Your dietitian helps you figure out your food needs based on your weight, lifestyle, medication and other health goals (such as lowering blood fat levels or blood pressure).

**Certified Diabetes Educators (CDCES):** A clinician such as a nurse/registered dietitian, or nurse practitioner has special training and background in caring for and teaching people with diabetes. Certified Diabetes Educators often help you learn the day-to-day aspects of diabetes self-care.

**Eye health care provider:** This health care provider is another key member of your diabetes care team because diabetes can affect the blood vessels in the eyes. The eye health care provider will be either an ophthalmologist (health care provider who can treat eye problems both medically and surgically) or an optometrist (someone who is trained to examine the eye for certain problems, such as how well the eye focuses). You should see your eye health care provider at least once a year for a diabetes eye exam, also known as a dilated retinal eye exam.

**Podiatrist:** This health professional is trained to treat feet and problems of the lower legs. For anyone with diabetes, foot care is important.

**Dentist:** People with diabetes are at somewhat greater — and earlier — risk of gum disease. The excess blood glucose in your mouth makes it a nice home for bacteria, which can lead to infection. You should see your dentist every six months. Be sure to tell your dentist that you have diabetes.

## Advance Care Planning



There may come a time when it is difficult or impossible for you to communicate the type and extent of care you want to receive. Advance care planning allows you to make decisions about your health care if you are unable to speak for yourself. By discussing and documenting these issues with a trusted relative or friend, you can ensure that your decisions are carried out.

The Community Conversations on Compassionate Care Program is an award-winning program. It provides “Five Easy Steps” to promote

conversations that help you complete your health care proxy and living will forms. A health care proxy is someone you choose to represent your wishes if you are unable to do so yourself. A living will is a legal document that describes what kind of care you want or do not want in order to prolong your life, if it should become an issue.

To learn more about Community Conversations on Compassionate Care, call the Customer Service number listed on the back of your insurance ID card or visit our website at [compassionandsupport.org](http://compassionandsupport.org).

## Palliative Care

We know that dealing with a serious illness can be difficult for you and your family. A palliative care program focuses on helping you find relief from the distressing symptoms resulting from your illness, such as pain, shortness of breath, and emotional stress. This team works closely with your health care providers to help coordinate your care. The team can also help with advance directives, so your health care providers and caregivers know your wishes. Talk to your health care provider about a referral if you think this might be helpful to you.

## Health Care Provider Communication

To achieve the best possible level of health care, work together with your health care providers. Take an active part in your care. Communication is key. Asking questions and understanding the answers will help to improve health. Take along a family member, friend or caregiver since it can be hard to remember everything the health care provider says.

1. Prepare for appointments. Write down questions before seeing the health care provider. Highlight the top three. Know what medicines, vitamins and nutritional supplements you take. Include over-the-counter products.
2. Be on time to your appointment.
3. Be detailed but to the point when describing your problems or concerns.
4. If you do not understand what you are told, ask the health care provider to explain again using different words.
5. Make informed decisions. Ask for reading material or where to find more information.

It is important to have confidence and trust in your health care provider. Clear communication is vital to improved health.

## Having A Chronic Illness Can Be Challenging

We hope you have found this information helpful in understanding your condition and how to stay as healthy and well as you can.

Please feel free to contact us at any time if you have questions about your health and wellness.

Our team consists of health care professionals such as nurses, social workers, dietitians, pharmacists and respiratory therapists who can help you get answers to your questions.

Please call the toll-free line at 1-877-222-1240 or use our TTY line: 1-800-421-1220 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. ET. If we are not available when you call, please leave your preferred phone number and the best time to call you.

Thank you.

The Case Management Team



The information in this booklet does not replace the advice or recommendations of your health care provider.