

Healthy Living with Diabetes



When you implement healthy choices to help manage your diabetes, you'll be better positioned to live a happy, healthy life.

While there are many challenges associated with the disease, diabetes can be managed through medication, treatment adherence, and a balance of lifestyle modifications to your diet and physical activity levels. It's important to take a holistic approach towards living healthy with diabetes. Let's review a variety of aspects that can affect how well you live with diabetes.

Nutrition

Eating a well-balanced diet is necessary to keep blood glucose levels stable. Prioritize foods that have a low glycemic index, such as green vegetables, 100% whole grains, and beans like chickpeas, kidney beans, and lentils. Consuming low glycemic foods will be the most effective way to manage blood glucose levels.

Other important diabetic dietary recommendations include avoiding fried foods, limiting foods high in sugar, carbohydrates, and fat. It is ideal to consume lean proteins such as fish or poultry as well as fruits and vegetables on a daily basis. The American Diabetes Association recommends following the Diabetes Plate Method to stay on track and portion out food appropriately. For more help, consider working with a registered dietitian nutritionist (RD/N/DR) to create an eating plan that works for you.



Management of Emotional Eating

Emotions can influence what, when and how much we eat. It's common for people to "stress eat" or eat to preoccupy themselves when they feel bored or experience other forms of mental or emotional distress. However, when you eat your feelings, it can hinder your weight loss or maintenance efforts. Check in with your emotions regularly and ask yourself if you want food because you are hungry or if you are looking to fill an emotional need. Here are some other exercises to help you manage emotional eating:

- Reflect on what emotions and situations trigger you to eat.
- Write a list of other actions to fulfill your emotional need instead. For example, call a friend, go for a walk, or do some quick stretching and deep breathing exercises.
- Assess your physical hunger cues to see if you are experiencing actual hunger.
- Track the foods you eat, when you eat them, how hungry you felt at the time, and emotions you experienced, if any.
- Involve family members and friends to support you and keep you accountable on your weight loss or maintenance journey.

The [Diabetes Food Hub](#) is a free tool that offers nutrition tips, recipes, meal planners, and a grocery list feature to assist with shopping. ¹

Weight Loss for a High Body Mass Index (BMI)

Weight loss can have a valuable impact on diabetes if you have a high BMI. For those with prediabetes, weight loss has proven to delay the onset or decrease the risk of type 2 diabetes (T2D). For those with T2D, weight loss may improve glycemic control and help reverse the progression of the disease. The best approach for weight loss for most people is to consume healthy foods, practice portion control, and to increase physical activity levels. Weight loss is hard work because it requires consistency around eating and exercise habits. Be gentle with yourself throughout your weight loss journey and celebrate small milestones along the way.

Physical Activity

A realistic exercise plan is an important first step toward becoming more active on a routine basis. If you are not used to regular exercise, light walking is a great place to start. Distract yourself, if you need to, by walking with a friend or listening to music or an audiobook. Set goals every day or every week and work towards increasing them. For example, start with 5,000 steps per day and then increase by 3,000 steps each week. Soon enough, you will start to feel like you are back in control of your body and health habits. If you would like assistance creating an exercise plan, the American Diabetes Association offers advice on SMART goal setting. ² Remember to consult your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise routine.

Mental Health

When first diagnosed with diabetes, denial and confusion is natural. It's common to feel a sense of, "not me," "I don't believe it," or "there must be some mistake." However, at some point, it's important to accept your diagnosis and take action to manage it. Otherwise, you run the risk of your health declining or other complications that might make treating your condition more difficult. If you catch yourself saying or thinking any of these phrases, you might be in denial.

Often times, after denial comes sadness or even depression regarding your diagnosis. Depression is a very common and serious mental health condition, but it is treatable. The following is a list of signs of depression. If you experience these symptoms for two or more weeks, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood.
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies.
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping.
- Appetite and/or weight changes.
- Physical pains/aches that do not have a clear cause and/or do not ease even with treatment.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.
- Decreased energy or fatigue.
- Moving or talking more slowly.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decision

With diabetes, you have a lot on your mind. Many activities are a part of your normal routine such as monitoring daily blood sugar levels, insulin dosage, meal preparation, and daily exercise. It can leave you feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. To prevent emotional exhaustion, it is important to stay in touch with your emotions and take regular inventory of how you are feeling. This will help you better understand yourself and your need for additional support.

For more information regarding mental health, check out these resources:

- The Anxiety and Depression Association of America provides additional information and depression treatment resources: www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/depression
- Empower Work provides free confidential counseling through text messaging: www.empowerwork.org/
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides 24/7 free, confidential support to those in crisis: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- The [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int) offers many resources on the topic of mental health. Their website contains more information on topics such as stress management, depression, mental health during COVID-19, and more.
- You may also refer to relevant benefit plan documents to learn about behavioral health coverage or benefits available through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) from your employer.

Financial Management

Living with a chronic disease like diabetes isn't just physically and mentally taxing. It also can be expensive due to the cost of doctor visits, medications, or indirect expenses of not being able to work.

Below are resources to help you save money on the cost of care.

- Use [Good Rx](#) to save up to 80% on your prescriptions. Drug prices vary by pharmacy. Good Rx will find savings and compare prices between major pharmacies in the United States. ³
- Good Rx also offers tips on how to save money on insulin through their cost comparison guide. ⁴ Medication discounts, copay cards, and patient assistance programs are a few methods that can make these medications more affordable.
- If you are struggling to pay for insulin and diabetes medication, four insulin manufacturers offer immediate assistance and long-term resources. Find out who manufacturers your medication is by checking the company logo on your insulin vial or pen and call them directly. To get started, [click here!](#)

Diabetes Management Programs

A variety of condition management programs are available to help you manage your diabetes and live more fully. Often times, diabetes occurs alongside other comorbid conditions, such as hypertension, obesity, hyperlipidemia, or cardiovascular disease. Refer to your employer's benefit documents to learn about the availability of a diabetes management program.