

How to manage diabetes



With diabetes, the body cannot manage the levels of glucose (sugar) in the blood.

Normally, people get glucose through the foods they eat. Then it goes into the bloodstream. The pancreas makes insulin, a hormone that helps the body take glucose from the blood to make energy. This process keeps the blood sugar at a normal level. In people with diabetes, two things can happen:

- The pancreas may not make enough insulin.
- The body may not use insulin the right way.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common type of diabetes. With this type, your body does not use insulin the right way. As a result, it cannot lower your blood sugar to a normal level. Type 2 diabetes usually develops slowly, over time.

Type 1 diabetes is when the body does not make insulin. Without insulin, your body cannot

get the sugar from your bloodstream into the cells of the body. Type 1 diabetes can be managed with insulin therapy and a healthy lifestyle routine.

Diabetes can cause serious health problems. These include damage to the blood vessels, heart, kidneys, nerves, skin and eyes. These problems can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney disease and a weakened immune system. They can also cause vision loss, nerve damage, skin infections and foot sores.

Adopting healthy habits can help manage diabetes. These habits are often called lifestyle changes. Taking medicine as your doctor tells you is also important to help manage diabetes.

Lifestyle changes can help you manage diabetes

Stop smoking

- **If you smoke, STOP.** Quitting helps improve the health of your heart and lungs. It also helps lower the risk of damage to your blood vessels, eyes, nerves and other organs.
- **For help with quitting and support,** call toll-free **1-800-QUIT-NOW** or visit www.smokefree.gov.
- **Eligible Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan members** can receive certain tobacco cessation products for free. Eligible over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription tobacco cessation products obtained from a Preferred retail pharmacy with a written prescription from your doctor are included in this program. You must meet age requirements for prescribed tobacco cessation drugs to receive this benefit. Visit www.fepblue.org/tobacco for more information.

Eat a healthy diet and be active

- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet** with foods that are rich in fiber. Avoid foods with high levels of unhealthy fats and cholesterol. Check the carbohydrate (“carb”) content of the foods you eat. Also, reduce your meal portion sizes. To learn more about how you can manage your blood sugars through diet, consider working with a dietician with Teladoc. Visit www.fepblue.org/telehealth to learn more.
- **Exercise regularly.** Try to be active at least 150 minutes over at least three days each week. Choose activities that provide a medium level of intensity. Walking is a good choice. If you are overweight or obese, even a little effort can make a difference. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you start an exercise program.



Visit www.fepblue.org to see what gym discounts and incentives are available through your benefits.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Eating a healthy, balanced diet and exercising regularly can help with managing your weight and your blood sugars. If you are overweight or obese, talk to your doctor about what methods may work best for you and your health.

Remember your shots

Stay up to date with your vaccines (shots). Check with your doctor about whether you need any of the following vaccines:

- Annual flu
- Pneumonia
- Hepatitis B
- COVID-19
- Shingles
- Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis (Tdap)
- Human papilloma virus (HPV)
- Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

Know your numbers

Blood pressure goals

- The blood pressure goal for many people with diabetes is to be below 130/80 mm Hg.
- Your doctor can help set a goal that’s right for you.



- Ask your doctor if you should check your blood pressure at home.

Cholesterol and triglyceride goals

- For people with type 2 diabetes, over half of deaths are due to heart disease and stroke. To lower the risk of these health problems, ask your doctor if you may need a statin. This is a medicine that lowers cholesterol levels.
- Your doctor may check your cholesterol levels during your regular visits.

Blood sugar goal

- Keep your blood sugar at a healthy level. This can reduce or prevent damage to the heart, blood vessels, kidneys and nerves.
- There are two types of tests that check blood sugar levels. These are the A1C and the self test.

A1C

- The A1C (or hemoglobin A1C) measures your average blood sugar level for the past two to three months. The A1C can tell you how well you are managing diabetes. If your level is high, your doctor may suggest changes to your medicine or diet.
- The A1C goal for most adults with diabetes is less than 7 percent. Meeting this goal can often help reduce the health problems caused by diabetes.

- For some people, a lower A1C goal may be better. This could be 6.5 percent or below.
- Other people may need higher goals (for example, less than 8 percent), such as those with serious health problems. These people may not be able to meet lower goals. Or meeting lower goals may be dangerous for them.
- If you are meeting your blood sugar goal, you may have an A1C check at least twice a year. You may need the test more often (four times a year) if you are not meeting your goal, or if your medicine has changed. Managing your blood sugar can help prevent serious future health problems, such as:
 - Foot and leg amputation (removal)
 - Kidney problems
 - Loss of feeling in your feet
 - Eye problems (such as glaucoma, cataracts or vision loss)
 - Hearing loss
 - Heart disease
 - Stroke

Understand your A1C result

Use estimated average glucose (eAG) to help you understand the results of your A1C test. A1C results are a percentage, but your self-testing result is in mg/dL. Use this table to convert your A1C result to a number you are

more used to seeing with your self-testing. For example, an A1C of 6 percent equals 126 mg/dL.

Estimated Average Glucose (eAG)	
A1C (%)	eAG (mg/dL)
6.0	126
6.5	140
7.0	154
7.5	169
8.0	183
8.5	197
9.0	212

Self testing

- Your doctor may want you to check your blood sugar at home. If so, follow the suggested schedule. You can test your blood sugar before meals, after meals or at bedtime. You can also test before exercise and when you think you may have low blood sugar.
- Most people with diabetes should have these readings:
 - Before a meal: 80 to 130 mg/dL
 - 1 to 2 hours after starting a meal: below 180 mg/dL

Know what to do about high and low blood sugar

High blood sugar

High blood sugar is called hyperglycemia. If your blood sugar is above 240 mg/dL, many experts advise checking your urine for ketones. Ask your healthcare provider when you should check for ketones, for example when you are ill. You can check for ketones by dipping a ketone test strip into a urine sample. Ketones are chemicals your body makes when it breaks down fat to use for

energy. This happens when your body doesn't have enough insulin to use glucose for energy. If ketones are present, do not exercise. This can make your blood sugar go even higher. If you have ketones in your urine, call your healthcare provider right away about what to do.

If left untreated, high ketone levels can result in ketoacidosis (DKA), a dangerous condition. If you have any of the warning signs of DKA below, call your healthcare provider right away or go to the nearest emergency room. Warning signs of (DKA) can include:

- Frequent urination
- Unusual thirst or very dry mouth
- High blood sugar levels
- High levels ketones in urine
- Extreme fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain
- Trouble breathing
- Fruity odor on your breath
- Confusion

Low blood sugar

Low blood sugar is called hypoglycemia. Low blood sugar can be serious. In fact, it can be life threatening. It happens when your blood sugar reading is less than 70 mg/dL. Some symptoms of low blood sugar include:

- Sweating
- Confusion
- Shakiness
- Nervousness
- Increased heart rate
- Feeling irritable
- Hunger
- Clammy skin
- Headache

If you think you may have low blood sugar, do a self test. If your reading is less than 70 mg/dL,

take 15-20 grams of glucose or carbs. Do this every 15 minutes until your blood sugar level returns to normal. Some examples of a 15-gram serving of carbs include:

- 3 glucose tablets
- 6 small, hard candies chewed quickly
- 1/2 cup of juice or regular (not diet) soda
- 1 tablespoon of jelly, jam or honey

Talk with your doctor if you have frequent episodes of low blood sugar that you can't manage. Ask for a prescription for a glucagon kit. This is an emergency injection of glucagon. This substance takes glucose that is stored in your body and sends it into your blood. This raises your blood sugar level right away. Glucagon is a medicine that could save your life. However, use it only in emergencies. Low blood sugar can cause confusion, so do not inject it yourself. Ask a loved one or family member to give you the injection.

Being aware and knowing what to do if your blood sugars drop low can help you prepare for this situation if it occurs. If you are worried or concerned about your blood sugar levels, please discuss this concern with your doctor.

Other medicines to protect the heart or kidneys

Some medicines used to treat diabetes and lower blood sugar may even help to protect the heart or kidneys. Examples of these include SGLT2 Inhibitors and GLP-1 Receptor Agonists. Also, there are medicines that can be added to your medication regime that have proven to be

helpful for people with diabetes to protect the heart or kidneys. These include:

- Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor
- Angiotensin II receptor blocker (ARB)
- Aspirin
- Statin

Ask your doctor if you may need any of these additional medicines.

Checkups

To help you stay healthy, be sure to schedule these checkups:

- Foot exam (yearly). Check your feet every day and call your doctor if you have any of these problems:
 - Signs of injury
 - Numbness
 - Burning
 - Tingling
- Eye exam (as recommended by your doctor)
- Dental exams (twice yearly)
- Kidney check (yearly)
- If you have kidney disease or nerve pain, you may want to ask your doctor to assess for autonomic neuropathy yearly.

Depending on your risk factors, your doctor may also check for the following:

- Liver disease
- Bone density scan
- Peripheral artery disease (PAD)
- Heart failure



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