



## Self-Managing Diabetes and Emotional Wellness

You can manage your diabetes  
and mental health needs for a  
long and active life.



This booklet contains basic information about managing your diabetes and mental health needs. Being informed is a key step on your journey to physical health and emotional wellness.



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## Step One: Learn about Diabetes



**Diabetes means that your blood sugar is too high. Blood sugar is also called blood glucose.**

Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, that fuels our body. The pancreas makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into our cells. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin well. This causes sugar to build up in the blood. This harms your body and organs over time.

**Here are the main kinds of diabetes, with the most common type listed first:**

**Type 2 Diabetes:**

When you have this kind of diabetes, your body does not make or use insulin well.

**Type 1 Diabetes:**

With this type of diabetes, your body does not make insulin.

**Gestational Diabetes:**

This kind of diabetes occurs in pregnant women.

Having diabetes can be difficult. But, once you learn how to manage it, you will feel better and you will protect your body from harm. Taking care of your diabetes will help you **get what you want out of life.**

Managing your diabetes can help you **avoid the health problems** it causes:

1. Heart disease, heart attack, or a stroke
2. Eye problems like trouble seeing or going blind
3. Problems with your nerves that make your hands and feet hurt, tingle, or feel numb.
4. Losing a foot or a leg.
5. Kidney disease
6. Gum disease and loss of teeth

With more **normal blood glucose**, you will:

- ⇒ Be less tired. Have more energy.
- ⇒ Be less thirsty and urinate less often.
- ⇒ Heal better. Have fewer skin and bladder infections.
- ⇒ Have fewer problems with your eyes, feet, and gums.
- ⇒ Live longer.

To feel your best: make healthy food choices, stay at your recommended weight, and move your body every day.



## Step Two: Know the ABCs of Your Diabetes

The “ABCs of Diabetes” help you remember how to take care of yourself.

### **A** is for A1C (A-One-C)

An A1C test shows your average blood sugar level over the past 2 to 3 months. This lets you know how well your blood sugar is being controlled over time. The A1C goal for most people with diabetes is [7 or below](#).

### **B** for Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is needed to move the blood through the body. If it's too high, it causes the heart to pump harder than it should. People with diabetes should have a blood pressure of [below 130/80](#).

### **C** for Cholesterol (Ko-les-ter-ol)

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that your body needs. But, if you have too much in your blood, it can lead to health problems. [LDL is bad cholesterol](#). It can clog blood vessels. It can cause a heart attack or stroke. [HDL is good cholesterol](#). It prevents clogs from forming in your blood vessels.

For men and women, LDL should be [below 100](#).

For men, HDL should be [above 40](#).

For women, HDL should be [above 50](#).

### Ask your health care team:

1. What your current A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol are.
2. What your A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol should be.
3. What you can do to get your ABCs where they should be.



## Step Three: Self-Manage Your Diabetes and Mental Health Needs

It can be hard sometimes, but the pay-off is worth it:

- ⇒ You will feel better.
- ⇒ You can achieve your life goals.
- ⇒ You will avoid damaging your body and organs.
- ⇒ You can live longer.



Self-managing your wellness has five main steps:

1. Eat healthy
2. Be active
3. Monitor your blood sugar
4. Take care of your emotional wellness
5. Take medicine as needed

You have an active role to play in managing your diabetes and emotional wellness.

Let's take a look at each of these important steps.





## Healthy Eating

One of the most important ways to manage diabetes is eating a healthy diet.

Healthy eating means eating the right amount of food for how active you are. Usually, that means not eating big meals and snacks if you also are inactive. A healthy diet also means eating a variety of foods. Your diet should have plenty of fruits and vegetables, plenty of whole grains, some dairy, and some protein (lean meat, fish, beans, or eggs). You also should eat a small amount of healthy fats (olive or vegetable oils, walnuts, almonds, or flax seed).

### With diabetes, you may need to develop **new habits**:

- ⇒ Eat breakfast every day. You need breakfast for energy and to keep your blood sugar stable.
- ⇒ Control the amount of food you eat. Small meals are best.
- ⇒ Include small, healthy snacks between your meals.
- ⇒ Eat every 4 to 5 hours while you're awake. Never go without eating for more than 6 hours during waking hours.
- ⇒ Brush and floss your teeth daily.



## CREATE YOUR HEALTHY PLATE!

For lunch and dinner, divide your plate into 4 sections.

1. **1/2 vegetables and fruit**, like leafy greens, green beans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, oranges, berries, melon, or apples.
2. **1/4 meat or other protein**, like fish, eggs, tofu, low-fat cheese, cottage cheese, soy, or beans.
3. **1/4 starch or grains**, like whole grain bread, rice, potatoes, or pasta.
4. On the side, include a **one-ounce glass of low-fat milk**. Or, drink uncarbonated water.



## Tips for a Health Diet

People have lots of questions about how to eat well with diabetes. That's normal.

Here are some facts about how you'll need to eat now.

### FACT VS. MYTH

**Myth:** I can never eat my favorite foods again!

**Fact:** There is nothing you cannot eat with diabetes. You just have to eat less of high sugar, high fat, and high salt foods.

**Myth:** I have to change my entire diet now!

**Fact:** You can still eat many of the same foods. You just need to eat smaller meals more frequently, and watch your portions. Do not over-eat.

**Myth:** I can never eat sweets and sugar again!

**Fact:** You can fit sugar into your meal plan. You just need to eat much less of it now.

## Diabetes Super Foods

The American Diabetes Association recommends 10 foods that are best for people with diabetes. These foods are high in fiber and low in fat and sugar.

1. Beans, dry or canned (rinse canned beans before eating)
2. Green, leafy vegetables like spinach, kale, and collards
3. Citrus fruit, like oranges, grapefruit, and lemons
4. Sweet potatoes
5. Berries
6. Tomatoes
7. Whole grains
8. Nuts, especially walnuts and almonds
9. Certain kinds of fish like salmon or swordfish
10. Fat-free dairy products

**Worried about the expense of fresh produce and fish?** It's cheaper to buy fruit and vegetables frozen, or when in season (like buying oranges or berries in the summer). Canned or frozen fish is cheaper than buying fresh fish. Beans and rice are affordable, too.



## Be Active

It is important to be physically active. Research shows the many benefits of moving our bodies every day. Being active doesn't only mean working out at a gym.

You can:

- ⇒ Take a walk
- ⇒ Work in your yard/garden
- ⇒ Dance to a favorite song
- ⇒ Walk places instead of taking the train or bus
- ⇒ Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator
- ⇒ Jog in place when watching TV
- ⇒ Play tag with your children or grandchildren
- ⇒ Take up a sport with a group of friends

### Being active:

- ◆ Lowers your blood sugar and cholesterol
- ◆ Lowers your blood pressure
- ◆ Lessens feelings of stress, anxiety, and panic
- ◆ Improves your mood
- ◆ Builds muscle and tones your body



### Plan for Activity:

#### Frequency:

Start at 1-2 days each week. You want to build up to being physically active 5 days a week.

#### Intensity:

During physical activity, you should be slightly out-of-breath. You should be able to talk, but not to sing.

#### Time:

Be realistic. Start with 5- or 10-minute sessions, and work up to 30-minute sessions.

### Remember!

- Always talk to a health provider before you start an exercise program.

- Wear good shoes and socks!

- Check your feet and toes daily for any cuts or sores. Call your health care team right away about sores that won't go away.

- Drink plenty of water.

- Eat a snack first, if you plan to exercise for more than 45 minutes in a session.

## Monitor Your Blood Sugar

People with diabetes need to monitor their blood sugar every day. There are affordable options to help you easily monitor your blood sugar.

There are two main ways your sugar will be tested:

1. The **A1C test** measures your average blood sugar level over 2 to 3 months. A normal result is 7 or lower for people with diabetes.
2. **Self tests** use a meter and lancet (needle) to take blood from your finger. These tests show your blood sugar level at the time of testing. Your health team will help you choose the one that's right for you.



If your numbers are not at target, don't worry. This information will help your health providers make decisions about getting you back on target.

- **Checking your blood sugar**

Glucose meters use a small drop of blood to show how much glucose is in your blood. Your health team will help you get the needed supplies, and show you how to use them.

- **What the numbers mean**

Blood glucose should be between 70 and 130 before meals.

2 hours after meals **start**, the levels should be less than 180.

Talk with your health care team about the best target range for you.

- **How often to check your sugar**

Self tests are done before meals, after meals, and at bedtime. People who take insulin need to check more often than those who don't.

- **What if your numbers are out of your target range**

Your providers will help you adjust your meals, activity, and medicines to get back in range.

- **How to record your blood sugar levels**

Your providers will teach you how to record your levels after testing.

## Take Care of Your Emotional Wellness

Many people worry that they won't be able to manage their emotional wellness and diabetes at the same time. This is a common concern.

The truth is it will be hard sometimes to manage both your mental and physical health conditions. But, if you are willing to keep on learning, trying your best, and asking for help when needed, you can join the thousands of people who are living a good life even with multiple health issues.

Many people say that the things they do to self-manage their diabetes also work in managing their emotional well-being. Indeed, eating a healthy diet, being physically active, building a support network, taking medicines as needed, and getting routine care will help you manage both of your conditions.

Because they are so common, let's look at two experiences that make it more difficult to manage multiple health conditions.

First is **stress**. It is crucial for your emotional and physical health that you learn ways to manage life stressors. Stress is very common in our society, and it has a bad effect on our emotions and bodies. For people with psychiatric disorders, stress can be even more of an issue. As soon as possible, please talk to your providers and other supporters about what you can do to best cope with your daily stress.



Second is **isolation**. It is very important for your well-being to be connected to other people. It's common for people coping with illnesses to stay at home, avoiding others and any outside activities. If this sounds familiar, please talk with your providers and supporters about how you can get the peer and social supports you need to cope and thrive.

## Take Medicine As Needed

### Diabetes Medications

People with diabetes take medicine to lower their blood sugar. These medicines also help reduce the risk of complications from diabetes (like heart or kidney disease).

### **There are different medicines used for diabetes:**

**Insulin:** A hormone that helps the body use glucose for energy

**Pills:** Lower your blood sugar

### **Many times, people with diabetes also take:**

- Blood pressure medication
- Cholesterol medication
- Aspirin (to protect the heart)

### Psychiatric Medications

Even if you are prescribed diabetes medication, you will continue to take psychiatric medications as prescribed. It's important to talk with your health and mental health providers about any concerns you have about taking new medications in addition to those you may take for psychiatric reasons. You don't have to stop taking one to take the others. But, you do want the best combination possible to avoid increased side effects.

### Medication Tips

Ask your health team why they have prescribed any medications for you.

Make sure to follow all instructions while taking your medicines. Pay attention to how your body reacts and how you feel. If your medicines make you feel badly, your health team can make adjustments to help you feel better.

Bring all medications (or labels) with you to each health care appointment. You also should keep a list of questions and side effects to discuss during health visits.

Ask your health team to help you fit your medicines into your daily schedule. Ask a family member or other supporter to help you remember, especially at first. You can time taking your medicines with a favorite TV show or when you brush your teeth. You also can set the alarm on your watch or phone.

Supplements or natural remedies (like vitamins or herbs) can interfere with your medicines. **Tell your health team about ANY remedies you take.**

## Step Four: Routine Care for Physical Health

Many Americans avoid going to the doctor! But, once you've been diagnosed with diabetes, it's crucial for you to **visit your health provider regularly**. You want to be sure that your "ABCs" (see page 7) and your mental health recovery are on track.

Here is a **basic schedule for diabetes health visits**. Ask your provider what will work best for you.

**Once each year**, visit a health provider for:

- ⇒ A cholesterol test
- ⇒ A triglyceride (type of blood fat) test
- ⇒ A complete foot exam
- ⇒ A urine and blood test to check for kidney problems
- ⇒ A flu shot

You may need to visit a Diabetes Specialist (called an endocrinologist) regularly.

Some people also visit a Diabetes Educator regularly to review their self-care plans.

**Once each year**, you also should have:

- A dental exam to check your teeth and gums (tell the dentist you have diabetes)
- A dilated eye exam to check for eye problems related to your diabetes (tell the eye doctor that you have diabetes)
- A complete foot exam (tell your podiatrist that you have diabetes)

**At least twice each year**, be sure to have a health provider check your:

- ⇒ A1C
- ⇒ Blood pressure
- ⇒ Weight
- ⇒ Self-care plan

Now that you've been diagnosed, **at least one time** you also should have:

- A pneumonia vaccination
- A Hepatitis B vaccination



## Resources

## My Notes

To learn more about diabetes, visit :

[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

[www.diabetes.webmd.com](http://www.diabetes.webmd.com)

[www.cmhsrp.uic.edu/health/podcasts.asp](http://www.cmhsrp.uic.edu/health/podcasts.asp)  
UIC Podcast Library's sessions on diabetes and heart health

To learn more about self-managing your mental wellness, visit:

<http://copelandcenter.com>

Here are resources used to develop this booklet:

-NDEP :  
[www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov)

-AADEP:  
[www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org)



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