



# Staying Healthy with Diabetes – A Guide for Older Adults

**A**s those who have diabetes know all too well, diabetes can be difficult to manage at any age. If you are older, however, and if you have had diabetes for a while, you may also have some of the complications of diabetes. These may include problems with your eyes, feet, kidneys or heart. If you are older, you may also have other health problems that make managing your diabetes more difficult.

The good news is that there are a lot of ways to make living with diabetes easier. There are specially trained people to help you, medical devices to make treating diabetes easier and resources that you can call on for special help. In this pamphlet, you will learn about some of these.

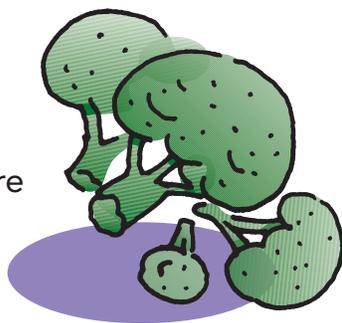
If you care for an older adult with diabetes who relies on you to know the best ways to manage their diabetes or help them with their health problems, this pamphlet may help you as well, or may provide you with some new ideas.



Inside are some challenges you may be facing because you have diabetes, the complications of diabetes or other health problems – and some suggestions for dealing with them.

## Healthy Eating

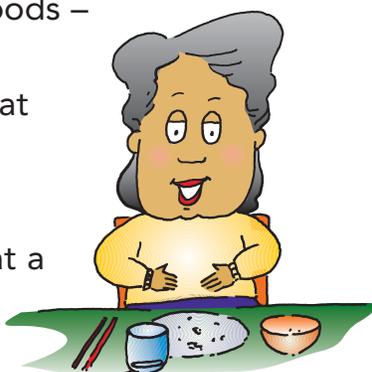
**G**eneral nutrition and weight management are important at any age. In order to properly care for your diabetes, you will need to understand how to make the right food choices.



▲ Ask your doctor or healthcare provider to refer you to a nutritionist who will help you select foods you like to eat and takes into account any eating difficulties you may have and the amount of physical activity you get.

▲ Eat a variety of foods – high in fiber and low in fat – and eat reasonably sized portions.

▲ As long as you eat a variety of healthy foods, you can eat occasional desserts and sweet foods.



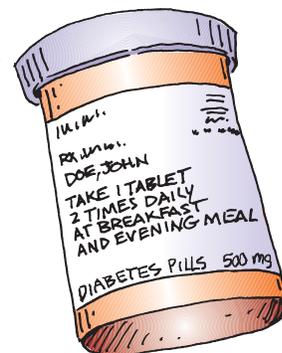
▲ Eat meals at about the same time each day and try not to skip meals.

▲ A nutritionist can also help you find ways to get adequate nutrition even when you are ill or you don't have a good appetite.

▲ Aim to be at a healthy body weight. A nutritionist will help you achieve and maintain a weight that's good for you – and your diabetes!

## Medications

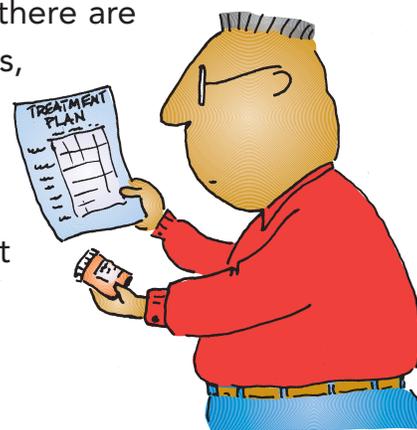
**Y**ou may have to take several kinds of pills as well as insulin for your diabetes, and you may need to take medications for other conditions as well. This can be confusing and stressful. Some of the pills may be hard to swallow. Mixing insulins and using a syringe may be difficult if you have arthritis or other conditions that hinder mobility. But there are ways of dealing with all of these issues.



▲ The first place to start is with your doctor or healthcare provider – he or she may be able to adjust your medications so that you can control your diabetes in the easiest way possible. For example, some may be available in liquid form. Be sure to ask.

▲ Be sure to TAKE ALL of your medications with you when you see your healthcare provider – even those for conditions other than diabetes.

▲ Premixed and predrawn insulin is available and there are special devices, such as insulin pens to make it easier to inject insulin.

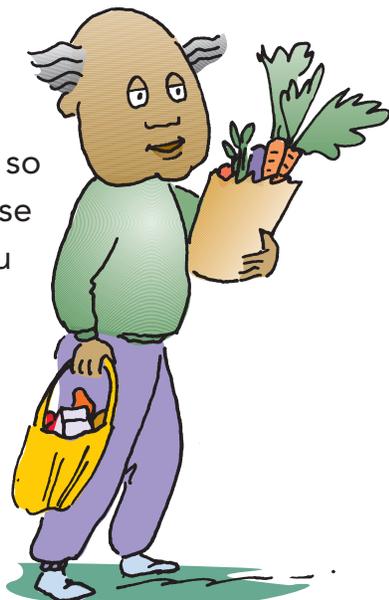


- ▲ If finances are a problem, there are organizations that can help – check the Resources List at the end of this pamphlet for phone numbers.



Sometimes it may be difficult to remember to take multiple medicines. Here are some ideas that may help:

- ▲ Use a 7-day pill case (available from your pharmacy).
- ▲ Keep your pills on your dining room or kitchen table.
- ▲ Use a watch that has a built-in alarm that can be set to go off when it is time to take your medicine.
- ▲ Schedule other routine activities at the same time as you want to take your medicine so that doing these will remind you to take them.

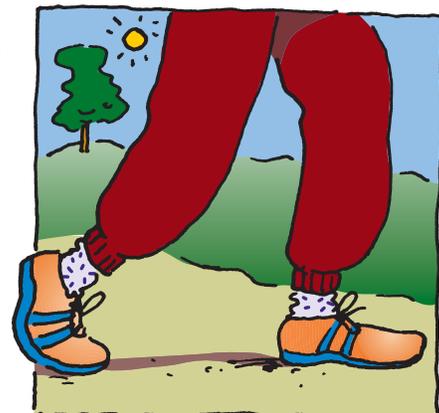


## Get As Much Physical Activity As You Can

**R**egular physical activity can help you control your blood glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol and weight. If you have arthritis or heart disease or other health problems, or are afraid you might fall, you may think you can't exercise – but you don't need to join a gym or do difficult exercises to be active and get the benefits of physical activity.



- ▲ Talk to your doctor about the types of activities you can do safely. Ask for a referral to a physical therapist who can find a physical activity that is safe and enjoyable for you.
- ▲ Try to do something active, such as walking, climbing stairs, gardening or biking every day. You might try walking in a shopping mall or joining a community center to enjoy group activities.
- ▲ You may need a cane or a walker to ensure that you won't fall.

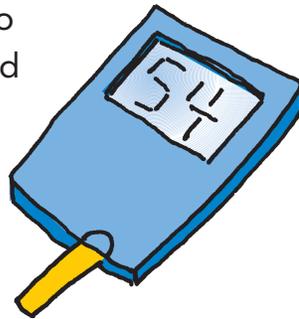


## Monitoring

**Y**ou may find that monitoring your blood glucose is difficult because it is painful or because it is too hard to read the numbers on the meter.



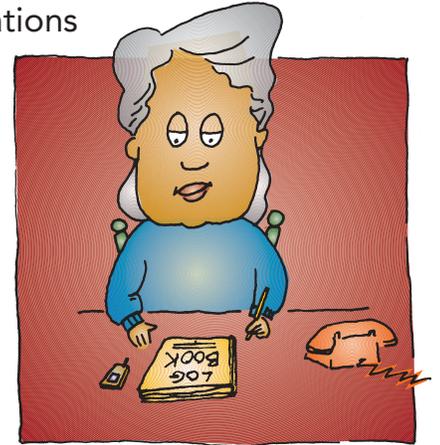
- ▲ Ask your doctor how often you should monitor your blood glucose and about any problems you have with your monitor.
- ▲ Ask your pharmacist about monitors designed for the visually impaired. Some of these monitors have very large numbers or can actually talk.
- ▲ If you're not feeling well, your doctor may ask you to monitor your blood glucose more often to determine if your food and medicine should be adjusted.
- ▲ If you're not monitoring your blood glucose at all, a diabetes educator can show you how. Ask your doctor for a referral.
- ▲ Don't forget to bring your blood glucose monitoring log book to every visit with your healthcare provider.



## Preventing or Slowing the Onset of Complications

**W**e know now that controlling blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol can prevent or slow the complications of diabetes.

- ▲ Ask your doctor what target blood glucose range makes sense for you.
- ▲ Ask your doctor what target blood pressure and cholesterol levels are appropriate for you.
- ▲ Be as physically active as possible.
- ▲ Eat healthy foods and work with a dietitian to create a meal plan and try to stick with it.

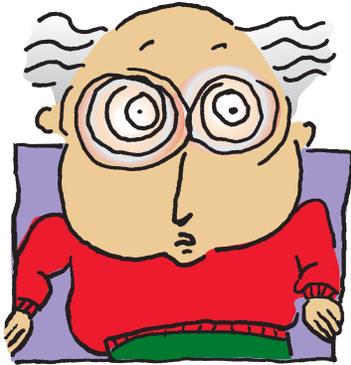


### Other suggestions:

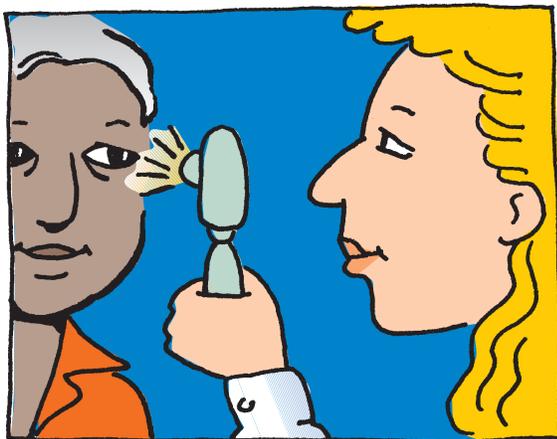
- ▲ Ask your doctor about diabetes education classes or refresher programs. Diabetes education is paid for by Medicare!
- ▲ It may be useful to take a refresher course about how to manage your blood glucose – ask your doctor or a diabetes educator about classes in your area. (Also, see Resources at the end of this booklet.)

## Don't Lose Sight of Anything...

Poor or failing eyesight, whether caused by a complication of diabetes or some other cause, can make dealing with diabetes much more difficult. New forms of eye treatment, such as medications or laser surgery are now available.



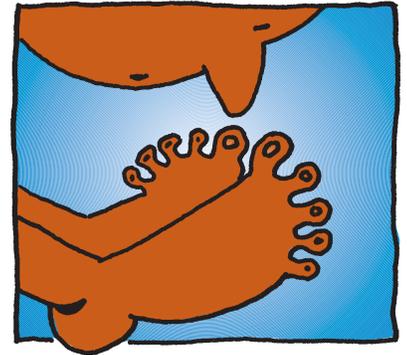
- ▲ Have regular dilated eye exams by an eye doctor who specializes in diabetes
- ▲ Use magnifying devices to help you see the numbers on insulin syringes and to help you recognize different pills (ask your pharmacist about these).



## Take Good Care of Your Feet

You may have problems with your feet such as decreased circulation or lack of feeling, or you may have pain in your feet.

- ▲ Check your feet daily for any redness, open areas or cracks in the skin. There are devices available to make it easier to see your feet (or ask a family member or friend to help you).
- ▲ Wear well-fitting shoes. Don't go barefoot.
- ▲ Have your healthcare provider check your feet at each appointment. Ask if you should see a podiatrist.
- ▲ Take care of cuts or sores right away and seek help if they are not healing.
- ▲ Use lotion for dry skin.
- ▲ Consider seeing a podiatrist regularly. Visits to podiatrists are paid for by Medicare.



## Low Blood Glucose (Hypoglycemia)

Low blood glucose (hypoglycemia) can occur if your food intake and your diabetes medications are not balanced properly.

- ▲ Learn to recognize your symptoms of hypoglycemia – these include excessive sweating, shaking, weakness, confusion, dizziness or extreme hunger.
- ▲ If you experience any of these symptoms, you should sit down and eat or drink fast-acting carbohydrates like 3-4 glucose tablets or hard candy, 4 oz. of fruit juice, 6 oz. of regular soda, 1 Tbsp. of sugar or jelly and call your doctor or a friend or relative to help you.
- ▲ Always carry glucose tablets, hard candy or a small box of raisins with you.
- ▲ Be sure to tell your doctor when you have had these episodes, so he or she can make changes in therapy. If you keep a logbook of your blood glucose, write down when you have low glucose episodes.



## Coping

As you know better than anyone, diabetes is a complicated disease and at times taking care of yourself, especially if you have other health problems as well, can seem overwhelming. You may feel like you'll never be able to manage with diabetes. But you should know that there is a lot of help available.

- ▲ When your blood glucose is in good control, you'll feel better – so work with your doctor to get your blood glucose in your target range.
- ▲ Don't be too proud to let others help you – you may have family members or friends who would be happy to help you if they knew you could use some assistance – helping with your medicines, perhaps driving you to medical appointments, taking walks with you, or even just talking – (perhaps you can offer them something in exchange...flowers from your garden, a home-cooked meal, some good advice...).
- ▲ Your doctor can recommend a social worker or a diabetes educator who will have good ideas for making things easier for you.
- ▲ If you're caring for someone who has difficulty with memory, or following their treatment plan, or who feels sad, be sure you talk with their doctor about this. There is help available.
- ▲ If you're having trouble preparing meals or caring for yourself, ask your doctor to refer you to a social worker who can help you with the resources listed on the next page.

## Resources

Below are some people and agencies that you might consider calling:

### To find out about Medicare and Medicaid:

#### Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

7500 Security Boulevard

Baltimore, MD 21244-1850

Phone: 1-800-MEDICARE or (633-4227)

Internet: [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

If you use the Internet, The Medicare program offers a searchable database of prescription drug assistance programs at [www.medicare.gov/Prescription/Home.asp](http://www.medicare.gov/Prescription/Home.asp). This website gives information on public and private programs offering discounted or free medication.

### To get help with the cost of medicines:

Drug companies that sell insulin or diabetes medications frequently offer patient assistance programs. Such programs are available only through your healthcare provider. The Pharmaceutical Research

and Manufacturers of America and its member companies sponsor an interactive website with information on drug assistance programs at [www.helpingpatients.org](http://www.helpingpatients.org).

### To find a diabetes educator:

Call the **American Association of Diabetes Educators**

1-800-832-6874

[www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org) and click on "Find a Diabetes Educator."

### To find a dietitian:

**American Dietetic Association**

1-800-366-1655

[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) and click on "Find a Nutrition Professional."

### To find diabetes educational programs:

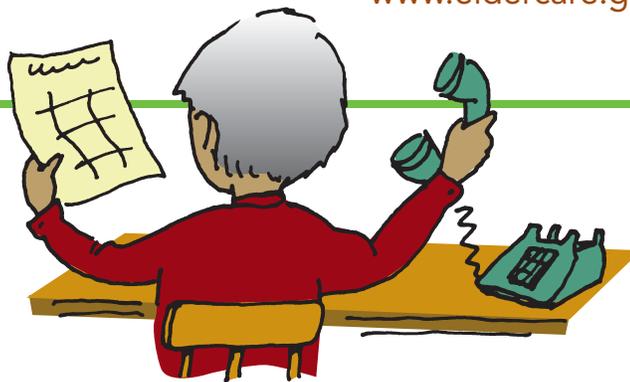
1-800-342-2383

### To Find a local social worker to help navigate long-term care options:

Elder-care Locator

800 677-1116

[www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)



Joslin Diabetes Center

For more information about how to manage your diabetes contact:

Joslin Diabetes Center [www.Joslin.org](http://www.Joslin.org) or 617-732-2440

## About Joslin Diabetes Center

**J**oslin Diabetes Center, dedicated to conquering diabetes in all of its forms, is the global leader in diabetes research, care and education. Joslin Research is a team of over 300 people at the forefront of discovery aimed at preventing and curing diabetes. Joslin Clinic, affiliated with Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, the nationwide

network of Joslin Affiliated Programs, and the hundreds of Joslin educational programs and publications offered each year for clinicians, researchers and patients, enable Joslin to develop, implement and share innovations that immeasurably improve the lives of people with diabetes. For more information about Joslin, call 1-800-JOSLIN-1 or visit [www.joslin.org](http://www.joslin.org).