



▶ PREVENTING AND MANAGING DIABETES 1



▶ THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF BLOOD GLUCOSE 2



▶ "FACT FOCUS" RESPONDING TO A HEALTH EMERGENCY

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PROMOTING CHOICE AND OPTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Preventing and Managing Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic condition that can lead to serious health problems, including heart disease, kidney failure, nerve damage, and blindness. People who have diabetes must carefully manage their individualized eating plan and exercise to remain healthy. As a direct support professional, you play a vital role in assisting people with developmental disabilities to eat right, exercise, and take their medication properly. These activities are especially important for people who have, or are at risk for, diabetes.

Our bodies change the foods we eat into glucose (sugar) that our cells use for energy. Blood carries glucose to our cells. The level of glucose in the bloodstream is controlled by a hormone called insulin. Diabetes occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin to properly regulate glucose levels, or when cells stop responding to insulin.

If a person has untreated diabetes, his or

her blood glucose is too high. Over time, this can damage the heart, kidneys, and eyes. Very high blood glucose can cause a serious condition, known as ketoacidosis (diabetic coma). Ketoacidosis must be treated quickly.

Pre-diabetes is a condition in which a person's blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes. People with pre-diabetes are at greater risk for developing diabetes. However, with the right individualized eating plan and enough exercise, it is possible to prevent diabetes.

If a person you support has diabetes or pre-diabetes, they may need your help to plan and prepare an individualized eating plan, follow an exercise routine, and monitor their blood glucose. Some people with diabetes may also need your help to take daily injections of insulin, or an oral medication for the treatment of diabetes.



Diabetes: Fast Facts

Risk Factors for Diabetes

- ✓ Being overweight or obese
- ✓ Being over the age of 40
- ✓ Having a family history of diabetes
- ✓ Being of African-American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or Native American descent

Symptoms of Diabetes

- ✓ Feeling tired or sleeping more than usual
- ✓ Needing to urinate more than usual
- ✓ Having numb or tingling hands or feet
- ✓ Having wounds that do not heal
- ✓ Having recurrent vaginal infections
- ✓ Having blurred vision
- ✓ Having unexplained weight loss or gain
- ✓ Being constantly hungry and/or thirsty

If you see these symptoms, *take the person to their doctor as soon as possible for a blood glucose test.*

Blood Glucose Management: How You Can Help

Dietary Support

- Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat milk are the best sources of carbohydrates.
- Avoid saturated fat and cholesterol.
- It is important to follow the individualized eating plan, and people may need assistance and encouragement.

Exercise Routines

- Help the individual choose a physical activity that they enjoy.
- Encourage him or her to be active for 30 minutes each day.
- Remind the person that they can walk, dance, or stretch while watching TV, listening to music, or talking on the phone.

Health Care

- Talk with the person's doctor about their individualized eating plan and exercise needs.
- Know how often blood glucose needs to be checked, and what the level should be.
- Know how to assist with the self-administration of insulin or any other necessary medication.



FACT FOCUS: Responding to a Health Emergency

If someone you support experiences a health emergency, you need to be prepared and respond quickly:

1. **Call 911.** If you think you need to call 911, do it! Don't call someone to ask if you should.
 - Tell them **WHO** you are; **WHERE** you are; **WHAT** has happened; and **WHEN** it happened.
2. **Stay** with the individual experiencing the emergency, stay calm, and provide reassurance.
 - Provide first-aid or CPR if necessary.
3. **Know** the person's current medications, allergies, insurance information, and primary doctor.
 - **Tell** this information to the emergency personnel when they arrive.
4. **Contact** the person's doctor, service coordinator, and family members as soon as possible.



The Highs and Lows of Blood Glucose

People with diabetes or pre-diabetes may need help managing their blood glucose levels. Those who take medication for the treatment of diabetes can experience low blood glucose if they skip a meal, take too much insulin or other diabetes medication, take their medication at the wrong time, or exercise too much.

Common Signs of Low Blood Glucose:

- Dizziness or shaking
- Blurred vision
- Fatigue or weakness
- Excessive sweating
- Nervousness or irritability
- Headache
- Feelings of hunger

Responding to Low Blood Glucose

Under the guidance of your doctor, learn about the best way to manage a low blood glucose. Some things that have been recommended include:

- If the person has a glucose monitor, help them use it to check their blood glucose.
- If levels are too low, bring the person something to boost their blood glucose:
 - Three pieces of hard candy; OR
 - Three glucose tablets; OR
 - A small glass of orange juice; OR
 - One tablespoon of sugar; OR
 - Two-thirds of a soda (regular, not diet soda).
- It is important to treat low blood glucose quickly, because it can get worse and the person can pass out.
- If you are unable to test the person's blood glucose levels, **treat them for low blood glucose anyway!**

All people with diabetes or pre-diabetes are at risk for experiencing high blood glucose. This can happen if their glucose levels are not sufficiently controlled with an individualized eating plan, exercise, or medication.

Common Signs of High Blood Glucose:

- Constant hunger or thirst
- Blurred vision
- Fatigue or weakness
- Dry skin
- Frequent urination

High blood glucose can be a medical emergency.

Responding to High Blood Glucose

- If possible, check the person's blood glucose with a glucose monitor.
- Find out if the person has been following their individualized eating plan and taking their medication correctly.
- If there is no explanation for the high blood glucose (for example, missing a dose of medication or eating a sugary snack), contact the person's doctor.
- Be sure you know if the doctor makes any changes to the person's medication or treatment plan.

If you notice that someone you support is having difficulty keeping their blood glucose at the levels recommended by their physician, you may need to assist them with following their individualized eating plan, exercising, and taking their medication. If the person is following their doctor's recommendations but still has high or low blood glucose, they need to see their doctor again, as soon as possible.

Recommended Portion Sizes

Food	Amount	Same Size As...
Rice or Pasta	½ cup	½ a baseball
Cheese	1½ ounces	Four dice
Meat or Fish	3 ounces	A deck of cards
Fruits and Vegetables	1 cup	A baseball
Peanut Butter	2 tbsp	A golf ball
Bread	One slice	

FYI: Resource Links for Better Living



For more information on managing and preventing diabetes, you can visit the following websites:

American Diabetes Association:
Prevention information
<http://www.diabetes.org/advocacy/advocacy-priorities/prevention/>

The California Diabetes Program:
Free educational and resource materials
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CDCB/Pages/DiabetesPrevention.aspx#>

The National Diabetes Education Program
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-communication-programs/ndep/Pages/index.aspx>

Free, picture-based diabetes information for people with low literacy
<http://www.learningaboutdiabetes.org/>

Primary care doctors and diabetic educators are also good resources. If someone you support has diabetes or pre-diabetes, talk to his or her doctor!

Check out www.ddssafety.net for more information that can help individuals with developmental disabilities live a healthier and happier life!

The site is translated into Spanish and Tagalog!