

Being Active with Diabetes: How to Get Started



As you may already know, being active offers a variety of health benefits. Physical activity can help:

- control your blood sugar
- lower your blood pressure
- help you feel better and reduce stress
- lower your risk of heart disease

It helps to start with an activity that you find to be:

- simple
- something you want to do
- easy to start slowly—and easy to increase a little each week

For example, you may want to try taking stairs instead of an elevator as part of your daily routine—or try parking a little further away from where you usually park. For most people with diabetes, walking is an ideal activity. Using a pedometer can help you keep track of your progress over time.

Some people living with diabetes need to be more cautious before starting a new physical activity program. Be sure to

check with your doctor or diabetes care team to see if the activity you choose is right for you. When you begin any new physical activity program, try to check your blood sugars more often so that you know your body's response to the new activity.

Depending upon your health and fitness level, other aerobic options include jogging, biking, swimming, low-impact or chair aerobics, or dancing.

Whatever activity you choose, the principles of frequency, intensity, type, and time (FITT) can help you succeed:

Frequency—Be active most days of the week.

- It is best to do some exercise every day, but if you are just starting a new activity program, you may want to set a goal to be active at least every other day.

Intensity—Keep the intensity moderate. You should be able to talk while being active.

- If you are planning to do a new activity, start slowly with five minutes at a time. Add two to five minutes each week.
- Slowly increase the time until you are exercising for 30 or more minutes every day.

Type—Whether your activity is aerobic or strength training, have three parts to your activity.

1. *Warm-up:* Gently stretch or walk slowly for five minutes to gradually increase your heart rate.
2. *Exercise:* For example, walking, jogging, swimming, or bike riding for 10–12 minutes.

3. *Cool-down:* Walk slowly to let your heart rate drop. This is a good time to gently stretch your muscles. Gentle stretching helps to prevent injury and increases your flexibility.

Time—The amount of your daily physical activity depends upon your personal goals. In general, try 30 minutes each day to reduce the risk of chronic disease, 60 minutes to keep from gaining weight, and up to 90 minutes to lose weight and keep it off.

What can help you stick with your activity plan?

It may be hard to add activity into your life, especially if you haven't been active lately. Once you have chosen a simple, easy activity which appeals to you and which can be increased gradually, try to:

- Make your activity as regular as sleeping and eating. Mark it on your calendar like any other appointment. Or write it down on an activity goal sheet. (See the "Weekly Plan" on the other side of this tip sheet.)
- Link with someone else to keep you motivated. Invite a friend to be your exercise partner.
- When you reach your goal, give yourself a reward. Treat yourself to movie tickets, a book, a CD, or even a bubble bath.
- If you are bored with doing one activity over and over, try a different activity. Or do different types of activities on different days of the week.

- When it is raining or too cold outside, try doing aerobics or stretching exercise inside where it's warm instead of giving up altogether. As an alternative, try walking in an indoor mall.

Physical activity and diabetes

Remember that some people living with diabetes need to be more cautious before starting a new physical activity program. Factors to consider:

- Always carry fast-acting sugar sources, identification, and your Medic-Alert bracelet.
- Stop exercising right away if you are dizzy, have shortness of breath, feel sick to your stomach, or are in pain.
- Do not exercise strenuously if your blood sugar is over 300 (if type 2) or 250 (if type 1).
- Drink extra fluids before, during, and after exercise.
- Wear shoes and socks that fit well.

Low blood sugar precautions

If you have type 1 diabetes or if you have type 2 diabetes and take insulin and/or diabetes pills, be sure to:

- Check your blood sugar before and after your activity program. Avoid exercise during the peak of insulin action, if possible.
- Plan to be active within an hour after eating your meals or snacks to prevent low blood sugars. You may need to eat an extra snack when your insulin or diabetes pills are working the strongest or you are doing very moderate to high levels of exercise for over 30 minutes.
- Be aware that moderate to high activity levels can lower your blood sugar right away or up to 24 hours after you have stopped being active. For this reason, it is best not to exercise right before going to sleep.
- If you have type 1 diabetes and your blood sugar is over 250, check your urine for ketones before you start

exercising. Do not exercise if ketones are moderate or high.

- Ask your doctor or diabetes care team about how you can adjust your insulin and your meal plan to prevent low blood sugars while you are being active.

To help you get started—and keep you going—you may want to use the “Weekly Plan” to set activity goals that you can easily reach.

Weekly Plan

This week, I will _____ (what?)
 _____ (how much?)
 _____ (when?)
 _____ (how many?)

How confident am I that I can follow my plan?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all confident ← → Very confident

How I plan to reward myself:

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.