

# Getting Active When You Have Diabetes

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Exercise, healthy eating habits, and diabetes can go hand in hand. But you must be prepared to exercise wisely.

## The Benefits of Exercise

Ask people why they exercise, and you'll get different answers. Some common benefits are

- More energy
- Increased strength
- Improved self-esteem
- Lower triglycerides
- Easier weight control
- Less stress
- Better appearance
- Less medication
- Better blood glucose control
- Lower blood pressure
- Lower cholesterol level

## Getting Ready to Exercise

Always check with your doctor before you begin an exercise program. You may need a checkup to ensure that your body can handle it. You may even need a stress test to prove that your heart is healthy enough.

Your medical team will help you adjust your diabetes medicine if your blood glucose readings change when you exercise. Do not exercise if your blood sugar is above 250 mg/dl or below 100 mg/dl before you begin. Get back in a safe blood glucose range before you start exercising.

Once you have your doctor's approval, start slowly. You may want to talk with an exercise specialist who knows about diabetes. Whatever exercise you choose, make sure it is something that you'll like.

For weight control, "aerobic" exercise is best. Good aerobic exercise includes brisk walking, biking, swimming, jogging, and dancing. To build muscle, you may want to do strength training using weights or rubber bands. People with diabetic eye disease or high blood pressure should not lift weights until these problems are controlled. Always check with your medical team before you start.

Do less than you think you can at first, and increase your efforts slowly. If you overdo, you may not want to ever "do" again.

Buy the right equipment. Even if you just plan to walk, buy the best shoes possible. Ask a foot doctor about the shoes that are ideal for your exercise choice.

## Exercising Safely

Test your blood sugar before and after you exercise. You may even need to test it during activity that is lengthy or difficult. Carry a snack of quick-acting carbohydrate if you take diabetes medicine. Good choices are juice, glucose gel or tablets, a small packet of honey, or some lifesavers.

Drink plenty of water, especially on hot days. Drink at least 12–16 ounces before you start, and then drink 4 to 6 ounces every 20 minutes. Avoid alcohol or caffeine.

Wear a visible diabetes ID. You will also be safer and have more fun if you exercise with a partner who knows that you have diabetes. Most people exercise more if they do so with a friend.

## After Exercise

If you exercise more than usual, you may have problems with low blood glucose reactions for up to 24 hours later. Check your blood glucose more often, and be prepared to treat it.

If you exercise regularly, you may need less diabetes medication or more food. Less medicine is better than more food if you need to lose weight. Ask your doctor about your specific needs.

Always check your feet after exercise. Report any problems to your doctor. A small blister or cut can become a big problem quickly if not handled properly.

Keep drinking plenty of water.

Once you begin exercising regularly, you will miss it when you can't. The first few weeks may be tough, but the benefits of regular activity will last a lifetime.

## Questions to Ask

1. What kind of exercise do I want to try? \_\_\_\_\_
2. When can I schedule a checkup with my doctor? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Who will exercise with me? \_\_\_\_\_