



TEXAS  
Health and Human  
Services

Texas Department of State  
Health Services

# Taking Charge of Your Health



**MANAGING DIABETES ONE DAY AT A TIME**





## You can manage your diabetes one day at a time by:

- Eating a variety of healthy foods.
- Checking your blood sugar.
- Taking medication your doctor prescribes at the right time.
- Being physically active each day.
- Losing weight if your doctor recommends it.
- Following your doctor's advice.

# Table of Contents

Managing Diabetes Starts Today.....	4
Medications.....	5
Handling Low Blood Sugar.....	6
Eating Habits.....	7
Boost Your Activity.....	8
If You Get Sick.....	9

## Taking Charge of Your Health

Your Mental Health.....	10-11
Your Heart.....	12-13
Your Kidneys.....	14
Your Feet.....	15
Your Eyes.....	16
Your Teeth.....	17
Daily Food and Medicine Record.....	18-19

# Managing Diabetes Starts Today

Taking simple steps such as eating right, exercising, checking your blood sugar, taking your medication, managing stress, and caring for your body will help you manage your diabetes and stay healthy.

If you have recently been diagnosed with diabetes, you're likely trying to understand a lot of new information.

Many people with diabetes live long, normal lives even though diabetes is a serious condition. With healthy habits, you can manage your diabetes and continue doing the things you like to do.

## What's Your Type?

Your doctor may have already told you that there are three main types of diabetes: Type 1, Type 2, and gestational diabetes. These conditions affect a person's ability to produce and use insulin, the hormone that controls glucose (sugar) in the body.

Diabetes causes a buildup of sugar in the blood and leaves your cells without the fuel they need. Over time, high blood sugar levels can damage blood vessels and hurt your eyes, kidneys, nerves, and heart. Properly managing diabetes can have a positive impact on a person's mental health.

### Type 1 Diabetes

With Type 1 diabetes, your body does not make insulin. Type 1 diabetes is treated with daily insulin shots or an insulin pump. Your doctor, nurse, or other health care provider will teach you how to give yourself the shots and help you establish a schedule that coordinates your insulin shots and mealtimes.

### Type 2 Diabetes

With Type 2 diabetes, your body does not make enough insulin, or the cells are unable to use the insulin that is made. Type 2 diabetes is treated with a combination of healthy lifestyle changes and medications (pills), though many people with Type 2 diabetes also may be prescribed insulin or other injectable medications.

### Gestational Diabetes

With gestational diabetes, your body does not make enough insulin during pregnancy. One of the ways that pregnancy changes your body is that your cells use insulin less effectively.

Gestational diabetes is treated with lifestyle changes first. Then, medications can be prescribed if needed. While much of the information in this booklet will be applicable to gestational diabetes, follow up with your pregnancy health care provider regarding your health and treatment.





# Medications

## Whichever medications you take, remember to:

### Follow your doctor's instructions.

Ask your doctor when and how often to check your blood sugar and take your medicine. Be sure to take the correct amount of medicine at the right time every day.

### Try to eat at the same time every day.

When taking some diabetes medications, if you forget to eat or wait too long to eat, your blood sugar may drop drastically. Following a regular mealtime schedule can help reduce the risk of potential unpleasant side effects that may come with taking certain diabetes medications.



# Handling Low Blood Sugar

## Know the Signs of Low Blood Sugar

Even if you take your medicine regularly, at some point you may find yourself with low blood sugar. This can happen if you forget to eat, the timing of the medicine, or if you take too much medicine, to name a few reasons. Low blood sugar will make you feel confused, weak, and dizzy. You may start to shake. Other signs include sweating, numb lips, or a bad headache. If these symptoms aren't addressed right away, you could faint.

### What Should I Do?

Be prepared. Always carry candies, sugar, honey packets, or glucose tablets/gels with you.



Depending on what other medications you are prescribed, you may also be prescribed a Glucagon Emergency Kit.

## Follow the 15-15 Rule

### What is the 15-15 Rule?

If you are experiencing low blood sugar, you can treat it by eating or drinking 15 grams of fast-acting sugar (carbohydrates). Then check your blood sugar after 15 minutes. Some examples of 15 grams of fast-acting sugar include any of the following:

- 1/2 cup of fruit juice or regular soda
- 1 tablespoon of sugar, honey, or corn syrup
- 6 to 7 hard candies
- 3 to 4 glucose tablets or glucose gel (see instructions on the packaging)



Repeat the steps of the 15-15 Rule as needed until your blood sugar is at a normal level. Once your blood sugar is raised and you start to feel better, take time to rest. If it is near your regular mealtime, eat a meal.

## Recognize the Signs of Emergency

If you faint or if you are not able to eat or drink, you may need to go to the hospital for help. **Call 9-1-1.** Do not try to drive yourself anywhere.

**Let others know the warning signs.** If they know what to do, they can call an ambulance and get help for you.



**Tell your doctor.** If you're experiencing low blood sugar, be sure to tell your doctor. They may need to change your medication.

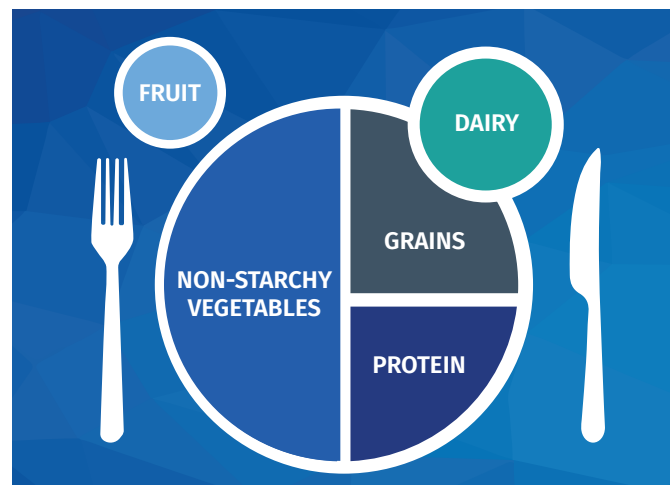
**Have a form of medical ID with you.** This can let others know about your condition in case of an emergency. Your medical ID could be a diabetes alert bracelet or necklace, a diabetes condition card in your wallet or purse, or a medical alert on your smartphone or device.



# Eating Habits

**Balanced eating is one of the most important things you can do to feel good and manage your diabetes. Small, positive changes can make a big difference. Try to:**

- **Follow the Diabetes Plate Method.** Developed by the American Diabetes Association (ADA), the Diabetes Plate Method is a great tool you can use for healthy meal planning.
- **Set a schedule.** Try to eat at the same time each day and don't skip meals. This can help keep your blood sugar at your recommended level. Work with your dietitian or other health care provider to come up with a meal plan that works with your schedule and lifestyle.
- **Avoid overeating.** Overeating may cause your blood sugar levels to go too high. Start with smaller portions, eat slowly, and stop eating before you feel full.
- **Limit fatty foods and sweets.** Your dietitian or health care provider can provide meal plans and recipes to help you eat enough vegetables and whole grains. Avoid large amounts of fast food and foods fried in butter and/or oil. Drink water or sugar-free drinks. Avoid regular sodas and other drinks (such as fruit drinks and sweetened tea) that have added sugar.
- **Learn new ways to cook.** You don't have to give up your favorite foods, but you may have to change the recipes to cut down on fats and sugars. Try new ways of cooking, such as broiling and poaching meats instead of pan-frying them or steaming vegetables instead of cooking them in butter or oil.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Ask your doctor if your weight is right for you. If you are overweight, work with your doctor or other health care provider to set realistic goals to get to a healthy weight.



## More About the Diabetes Plate Method

Scan this QR Code with your phone to visit [diabetesfoodhub.org/articles/what-is-the-diabetes-plate-method.html](https://diabetesfoodhub.org/articles/what-is-the-diabetes-plate-method.html) for more information about the Diabetes Plate Method.

# Boost Your Activity

Being active will help you feel better, manage your blood sugar, and help you avoid more health problems. Get started today and remember to:



## Start slowly.

Talk to your doctor or other health care provider before becoming active. Mild exercises, like walking, gardening, chair exercises, adapted tai chi, yoga, or dancing are great ways to start. Begin with a few minutes of activity each day. Add a few extra minutes each time as you get stronger. When you do a little bit of activity each day, it becomes easier and is more likely to become a habit.

## Choose an activity that you enjoy.

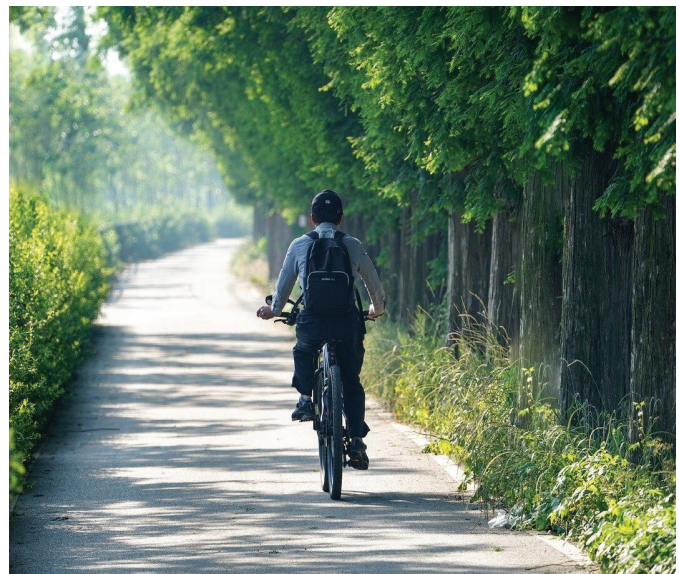
The more fun it is, the more likely you are to do it every day. Get a friend or family member to exercise with you.

## Be active every day.

It is better to walk for 10 to 20 minutes every day than for an hour once a week.

## Stop for pain.

If you feel pain, slow down or stop until the pain goes away. If it comes back, talk to your doctor or health care provider before you exercise again.



## Step it up.

Talk to your doctor or health care provider about increasing the amount you exercise, how much is safe for you, and how much you should eat before you exercise.





## If You Get Sick

Take extra care when you have an illness, like an infection, the flu, a sore throat, or a bad cold. Stress from illness causes your body to release hormones that raise blood sugar, making it more difficult to manage your blood sugar level.

### Remember to:

#### Call your doctor or clinic.

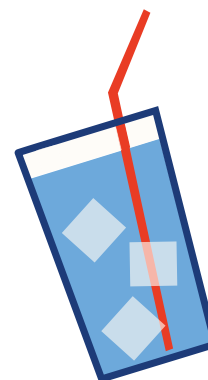
Your doctor may ask you to check your blood sugar more often and/or make changes to your insulin or medications. If you are too sick to eat regular meals or have vomiting or diarrhea, try to eat simple foods like unsweetened applesauce, crackers, or regular Jell-O/gelatin (not sugar-free).

#### Ask your doctor about warning signs for diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA).

When your body doesn't have enough insulin, it starts to break down fat as fuel. When this happens, our bodies produce a chemical called ketones. When too many ketones are produced too fast, that can cause DKA. DKA is very serious and can cause a coma or even death. Ask your doctor about over-the-counter ketone test kits and strips.

#### Drink plenty of fluids.

Drink a lot of water. If you are not able to eat anything, you may have regular sodas or fruit juice. Sip a little at a time if you feel sick to your stomach.



#### Ask your doctor or pharmacist about cold or flu medicines.

Remind them about your diabetes. Some medicines (even those sold without a prescription) may affect you differently or interfere with your insulin.



#### Create a sick day kit.

If you do get sick, it'll make things easier if you already have a sick day kit ready to go with things you'll need. Some items for your kit may include an extra glucose meter with test strips, glucose tablets/gels, medications for diarrhea and vomiting, and a thermometer.





# Taking Charge of Your Health

People who have diabetes are more likely to develop complications like heart disease, strokes, kidney damage, infections, gum disease, and eye problems. People with diabetes may also struggle more with their mental health. But there are practical steps you can take each day to protect your health and live well for years to come.

## Your Mental Health

Diabetes can be a difficult condition to manage. This can affect your mental health in several ways. Diabetes can increase the risk of developing depression, anxiety, and disordered eating. Untreated mental health issues can make diabetes symptoms worse.

Talk to your doctor about seeing a licensed counselor or therapist if you think your diabetes is affecting your mental health, or if your mental health is making it difficult to manage your diabetes. In addition to seeking help elsewhere, there are some steps you can take to improve and maintain good mental health.

## Take Charge

**Do mindfulness exercises.** Being mindful helps us be more aware of our current thoughts, emotions, and surroundings. Doing mindfulness exercises can help us learn any habits we may be doing without realizing it or habits that might be harming us. Do exercises like yoga or meditation to practice mindfulness.

**Limit your alcohol intake.** It is common for people to turn to alcohol to cope with their mental health struggles. Overuse of alcohol can make managing our mental health more difficult. Alcohol can cause mental health conditions like depression and anxiety to worsen. Talk to your doctor or health care provider about your alcohol intake and if you think it is affecting your mental health.

**Set small goals.** Your diabetes management won't feel as overwhelming if you set small, achievable goals and go from there.

**Spend time with trusted and supportive loved ones.** Talking with neighbors, friends, and loved ones about your concerns and feelings can relieve stress and promote resilience.





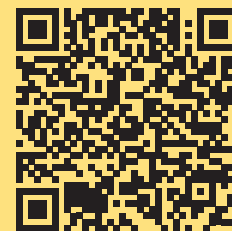


**Get enough sleep.** Getting at least seven to nine hours of sleep each night improves learning, decision making, and creativity. Not getting enough sleep can make it harder to make good decisions, manage your emotions, and behavior, and cope with change.

**Try to exercise most days of the week.** Exercise can reduce stress and it releases chemicals that help improve your mood.

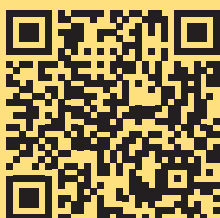
**Join a Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support (DSMES) class.**

DSMES classes not only provide you with diabetes education and tools that will help you manage your diabetes, but also a support group of people who understand the challenges of living with diabetes. To find a DSMES class near you, visit the American Diabetes Association (ADA) DSMES class locator website at [diabetes.org/tools-resources/diabetes-education-programs](https://diabetes.org/tools-resources/diabetes-education-programs).



**Talk with other people with diabetes.**

Connecting with other people who have diabetes is a great way to get and give additional support. The Diabetes Online Community (DOC) offers several options for people with diabetes to connect with others online through community forums, social media platforms, and advocacy groups. To find out more about the DOC, visit the American Diabetes Association (ADA) website at [diabetes.org/tools-resources/get-connected](https://diabetes.org/tools-resources/get-connected).



**Talk to a Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialist (CDCES).**

A CDCES can help identify struggles you may have with your diabetes care and problem-solve solutions with you. To find a CDCES near you, visit the Certification Board for Diabetes Care and Education (CBDCE) website at [cbdce.org/locate](https://cbdce.org/locate).



# Taking Charge of Your Health

## Your Heart

High blood sugar harms blood vessels, which can cause heart problems. Heart and blood flow problems are made worse by smoking, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

## Take Charge

**Check your blood pressure.** Many drug stores have free machines to check your blood pressure. If your blood pressure is higher than 130/80, talk to your doctor.

**Eat low-salt, low-fat, high-fiber foods.** This habit helps to keep your blood pressure and cholesterol down. Avoid fast food and eating out too often. Try to cook more meals at home. Eat foods high in fiber such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables to help improve your cholesterol. Try to eat foods with heart-healthy fats like nuts, seeds, olives, and avocados. Cook with plant-based oils like olive oil, canola oil, and safflower oil.

**Get some exercise most days of the week.** Exercise improves blood flow, lowers blood pressure, and can lower cholesterol. Try to have a mix of cardio exercises like jogging, cycling, or swimming with strength-building exercises like weightlifting, push-ups, and squats.



**Lose weight if it's recommended by your doctor.** Losing a few pounds will help keep your heart from working too hard. If you are not sure where to start, ask your doctor or dietitian for a plan to help you lose weight.

**Manage your stress.** Avoiding stress and relieving stress when you experience anxiety or are feeling overwhelmed will help you manage your blood pressure and blood sugar.





**Don't smoke, vape, or use tobacco products.** If you do smoke or vape, now is a great time to quit. Smoking and vaping negatively affects many areas of your health. Quitting will help you better manage your diabetes.

**Moderate your alcohol consumption.** Excessive drinking is linked to poor heart health. Talk to your doctor about how much alcohol is too much for you.

**Take your medicine.** If you are on medication to lower your blood pressure or cholesterol, take it as directed by your doctor. Ask your doctor about taking aspirin for your heart.

**See your doctor if you notice possible signs of heart disease.** Make an appointment to see your doctor if you have cramps or pain in your legs or feet, your blood pressure is more than 130/80, you are short of breath after a little activity, or you have a lot of swelling in your feet.



**Ready to quit tobacco?**

**Scan this QR Code  
or visit  
[yesquit.org](https://www.yesquit.org)**





# Taking Charge of Your Health

## Your Kidneys

Diabetes can damage the small blood vessels in the kidneys. This can make it harder for your kidneys to clear the waste out of your blood.

If your kidneys stop working, you will need to have your blood cleaned by a machine (a treatment called dialysis) or have a kidney transplant.

Damage to your kidneys can happen slowly and with few symptoms. It is important to get tests that check how well your kidneys are doing as often as recommended by your doctor or other health care provider.



## Take Charge



### **Keep your A1c at goal level.**

An A1c blood test measures your average blood sugar level over the past two to three months. Your doctor will set a goal for what your A1c level should be.

### **Keep blood pressure lower than 130/80.**

If it gets higher, call your doctor.

### **Get your kidneys checked.**

Ask your doctor or health care provider about getting a urine test (microalbumin) at least once a year and about medicines and food that can protect your kidneys.



## Your Feet

Because diabetes affects nerves, it can make it hard to feel pain in your feet and legs. You may not know if or when you have been hurt. Diabetes can also cause problems with blood circulation. This makes it hard for cuts and sores to heal and can cause infection.

## Take Charge

**Check your feet every day.** Look for cuts, sores, and blisters. Put lotion on dry spots to reduce the risk of cracks in your skin. Use a mirror to see the bottoms of your feet or ask a family member or friend to help you.

**Keep your feet clean.** Wash your feet every day with mild soap and warm water. Test the water first to make sure it's not too hot. Dry your feet well, especially between your toes.

**Exercise.** Staying active improves blood flow to your legs and feet.

**Cut your toenails straight across.**

Use clippers, not pointed scissors, and be careful not to cut the skin. Gently smooth each nail with an emery board or non-sharp nail file. Never cut corns and calluses. If you have hard or thick toenails, ask your doctor if a foot specialist should cut them for you.

**Always wear socks and shoes.**

Cotton socks help keep your feet dry. Comfortable shoes help your blood flow and help protect your feet from injury. Never go barefoot.

**Check your shoes.** Before you put on your shoes, feel around inside or shake the shoe to find any small objects that could cut your feet.



**Call your doctor if you see signs of trouble.**

Pain or swelling in your feet, a cut or burn that becomes red or sore, calluses, corns, and ingrown toenails can lead to bigger problems.



# Taking Charge of Your Health

## Your Eyes



Diabetes can harm the blood vessels in your eyes. This can lead to eye disease and even blindness. You can take steps to protect your vision from eye diseases like diabetic retinopathy, macular edema, cataracts, and glaucoma.

## Take Charge

### **Manage your blood sugar.**

Managing your blood sugar protects the sensitive blood vessels in your eyes.

### **See the eye doctor (ophthalmologist or optometrist) once a year.**

Have a dilated eye exam every year, even if your eyes are not bothering you. Some types of eye disease do not have early warning signs. Be sure to tell the eye doctor about your diabetes diagnosis.

### **Watch for problems.**

Report blurry vision, flashes of light in your eyes, blind spots, “things” floating in front of your eyes, or other changes in your vision to your doctor.

### **Don't use tobacco products.**

Smoking and vaping can cause high blood pressure which can make eye problems worse.







## Your Teeth



High blood sugar can make it harder to keep your mouth healthy. People with diabetes have a higher chance of having gum disease, an infection of the gum and bone that hold your teeth in place. Diabetes can increase the amount of sugar in your saliva, which can lead to more bacterial growth and plaque buildup. Gum disease can lead to pain, bad breath that doesn't go away, chewing difficulties, and even tooth loss.

## Take Charge

**Manage your blood sugar.** Managing your blood sugar can help your body fight any bacterial or fungal infections in your mouth and help relieve dry mouth caused by diabetes.

**Brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.** Floss your teeth at least once a day.

**Quit smoking.** Smoking makes gum disease worse. To help you quit smoking, call 1-877-YES QUIT (1-877-937-7848).



**See your dentist for regular checkups.**

Tell your dentist that you have diabetes and if your gums are red, swollen, or bleed easily. Tell your dentist if your dentures (false teeth) do not fit right.



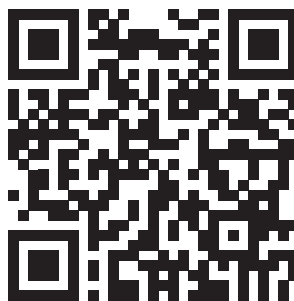






**Want even more information about diabetes management?**

To access additional education materials and more, scan this QR Code with your phone or visit [dshs.texas.gov/txdiabetes/materials](https://dshs.texas.gov/txdiabetes/materials).



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