

Healthy Living and Self-Care Living with Diabetes

This is the first in a series of four handouts that you will get from the Nova Scotia Diabetes Assistance Program. This information does not replace contact with your doctor or other members of your diabetes team.

These materials are designed to provide tips and help you find the supports you need to manage your diabetes.

Other handouts in the series include:

2 You and Your
Blood Sugars

3 Staying Well
with Diabetes

4 Making the Most
of Your Medications

What is healthy living?

Healthy living means making good choices, such as choosing healthy foods, getting regular activity or exercise, and managing the stresses in your life. Through healthy living, you can gain and keep control of your diabetes. Making the right choices helps you to take care of yourself. When you take care of yourself, you feel better about yourself.

Tips for healthy living apply to everyone. What is good for you is good for your whole family. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Tips to eat well

- Don't forget breakfast – eating three meals a day helps prevent overeating.
- Limit high fat foods. Try skim or 1 per cent milk. Limit gravy and fried foods.
- Watch your portion sizes.
- Choose whole grains, fruits, and vegetables more often.

Tips to start moving

- Any type and every bit of activity counts. Try taking the stairs. Park far away from the door.
- Start slowly. Minutes add up – try 10 minutes at a time. Build up to 30–60 minutes of moderate activity, such as brisk walking, on most days.
- Make it fun, and get your family and friends involved.
- Be a role model – turn off the TV and ...
- Join or form a walking group with friends, family, neighbours, or people from work.

Tips to manage stress

Enjoying life and managing stress are important parts of diabetes care.

- Identify your stresses.
- Make a plan on how to deal with these stresses. Focus on the things you can do something about.
- Recognize unhealthy ways of dealing with stress. Do you overeat? Smoke? Drink? Try to come up with healthier choices, such as talking to a friend or joining a quit smoking program.
- Find time to have some fun and relax – go for a walk, pick up a book, listen to your favourite music.
- Get lots of rest.

What is self-care?

Self-care means caring for yourself. It means making decisions and taking action to improve your health and stay healthy. If you have diabetes, it also means learning all you can about diabetes and how to care for it. Taking care of your diabetes will reduce your chances of getting complications, such as heart, kidney, nerve, or eye disease.

Who is my diabetes team?

Along with your doctor, core diabetes team members include nurses, dietitians, and pharmacists, with special training in diabetes.

Learning all you can about diabetes and how to care for it are important first steps in self-care. This new information and the skills you learn will **increase your confidence** to better manage your diabetes. It will also help you to

- **Talk with your doctor** and other members of your diabetes team about your diabetes treatment plan.
- **Set realistic goals.**
- **Solve problems.**
- Know when to **seek help** and who can help you.
- Develop a more **positive attitude** about your diabetes.
- **Find and build supports** among family and friends.

How often should I see my doctor?

See your doctor and other members of your diabetes team regularly – about every 3 to 4 months. These visits will

- Keep you, your doctor, and your diabetes team up to date about your diabetes.
- Allow you to ask questions.
- Ensure that needed tests are done and discussed.

Remember, you cannot always see or feel some of the problems that develop with diabetes. Do not wait for something to go wrong.

What tests should I get? How often should I be tested?

Regular testing lets your doctor and diabetes team know if your diabetes treatment needs to change. These tests also show if you are developing any complications from your diabetes or if your complications are getting worse. These tests also help your doctor decide what are the best medications for you.

Every visit to the doctor

- Blood pressure checked.
- Home blood sugar tests reviewed.
- Specific questions about your diabetes answered.

At least twice a year

- An A1C (pronounced A one C) test. This test measures your diabetes control over the last 3 months. If you take insulin, you may need to have this test done more often.

Once a year

- **A dilated eye examination.** Ask to make sure an eye specialist uses eye drops to see the very back of the eye.
- **A foot examination.** This can be done by a foot care specialist or doctor, or at the Diabetes Centre. See your doctor more often if you are having any kind of foot problem including corns, blisters, cuts that do not heal, redness, pain, or loss of feeling.
- **Blood and urine tests.** These will help check your kidneys and overall diabetes control, and let your doctor know if there are any other problems.

- **A flu shot.** This will reduce the risk of serious illness. Illness of any kind (flu, cold, surgery) will affect blood sugars and overall health.
- **A dental exam.** This will help to identify and prevent gum disease and loss of teeth.

What should I do to manage my diabetes?

Pay attention to your diabetes all the time. Sometimes this is hard, but getting into a routine will make managing your diabetes easier.

Every day

- Follow a healthy eating plan.
- Be active.
- Take all of your medications as prescribed.
- Test and record your blood sugars.
- Look at your feet. Wash and dry them well. Report any problems.
- Deal with your stresses.
- Keep a positive outlook.

Did you know?

Yearly eye examinations and flu shots are free for people with diabetes living in Nova Scotia.

Where do I go to learn more about my diabetes?

Your doctor

Your doctor can refer you to a **Diabetes Centre** in your area. For the location of Diabetes Centres in Nova Scotia, visit the Diabetes Care Program of Nova Scotia website www.diabetescareprogram.ns.ca. This website will link you to other reliable diabetes websites.

Canadian Diabetes Association

The Nova Scotia Division of the Canadian Diabetes Association (**1-800-326-7712**) and their website (www.diabetes.ca) can direct you to valuable resources and information.

Your pharmacist

Your pharmacist will be happy to answer questions about diabetes, your meter, strips, and any medications you take.

This brochure was developed by the Self-Care Committee of the Diabetes Care Program of Nova Scotia. We would like to acknowledge and thank our partners for their contributions:

- The Canadian Diabetes Association
- The Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia
- Nova Scotia's Diabetes Educators

A special thank-you to the many individuals with diabetes, whose knowledge, expertise and comments are reflected in these materials.

Diabetes Assistance Program

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1 First in a series on how to manage your diabetes

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