

Diabetes: Right From the Start

If you are new to diabetes, you probably have many questions and concerns. It is common to ask, “Why is this happening?” and “How will diabetes affect me?” It can seem overwhelming. Along with learning about diabetes and how to care for it, there are seven key messages that can help you get off to a good start.

1. Diabetes is self-managed.

Caring for diabetes is different from caring for other illnesses you have had. There is a lot more to do than just taking a daily pill. The decisions you make about physical activity and what and when you will eat will affect both how you feel today and your future health and well-being.

It is not easy to manage diabetes, and it can feel like a burden. There are times you may struggle with all the choices you have to make. But with the help and support of your health care team and those who care about you, you can do it.

2. Take diabetes seriously.

Although many people think type 2 diabetes is less serious than other types, you need to take your diabetes seriously. By doing all that you can to manage it, you greatly increase your chances for a healthy future.

3. Learn all you can.

Most of diabetes care is self-care. The more you know about it, the better

you will be able to manage it. Ask your provider for a referral for diabetes education and to see a dietitian. Education can help you go from just **being** in charge to **taking** charge. You can control your diabetes rather than letting your diabetes control you. You will also learn how to make changes in your lifestyle and receive support. Many education programs invite family members to attend as well.

You also need to learn about yourself and how diabetes affects you. You will become the foremost expert about your own diabetes and what does and does not work for you.

Diabetes is a lifelong condition that will present new questions, feelings, and challenges along the way. It is easier to maintain your hard work if you continue to learn and get support.

4. Your treatment will change over time.

Type 2 diabetes is treated in stages, and your treatment will likely change over time. Most people start with diet and exercise, add one or more pills, and then take insulin or another type of shot. Changes in treatment do not mean that you have failed or that your diabetes is worse. It simply means that your body needs more help to keep your blood glucose level on target.

5. Negative emotions are common.

Living with diabetes is difficult. Feelings of anger, guilt, fear, frustra-

tion, stress, and sadness are common and will probably be different from day to day. In addition, people with diabetes are about twice as likely to become depressed. Let your health care provider know if your emotions are getting in the way of managing diabetes or enjoying your daily life. Help is available if you ask.

6. Take it one step at a time.

Diabetes often involves making changes in your food, exercise, and other habits. It can quickly become too hard if you try to do it all at once. Start by choosing one thing that is important to you. Try to make small changes each day. It is likely that you will try different things along the way. Use what you learn about what does and does not work as a guide. Perfection is not the goal. It is what you do most of the time that counts.

7. Complications don't always happen.

You may have seen the toll of long-term complications on others. The good news is that these can be delayed or prevented by keeping your blood glucose and blood pressure levels in the target ranges. There are no guarantees, but you can greatly reduce your risk.

Living with diabetes is not easy. But with the help of your health care team and your family and friends, you **can** do it.

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