

Physical Activity

Note to the Health Care Professional: Topics in this handout are discussed in Chapter 7 of the *American Dietetic Association Guide to Diabetes Medical Nutrition Therapy and Education* (1).

When counseling clients for physical activity, determine the following:

- Whether clients have had appropriate pre-exercise tests and screenings
- Whether a client's physical activity program should be adjusted because they have complications
- Whether clients need assistance with exercise-related low blood glucose prevention and treatment
- Whether clients with type 1 diabetes understand how to check ketones before activity when blood glucose is elevated
- The availability of community-based resources to help clients safely begin and/or sustain a physical activity program
- The need for additional support for clients to get or stay active

Reference

1. Hayes C. Physical activity and exercise. In: Ross TA, Boucher JL, O'Connell BS, eds. *American Dietetic Association Guide to Diabetes Medical Nutrition Therapy and Education*. Chicago, IL: American Dietetic Association; 2005:71-80.

Physical Activity

The Rewards of Being Active

For people with diabetes, regular physical activity offers many rewards. Being active 30 minutes a day, at least five days every week can help you:

- Lower your blood glucose.
- Keep your heart healthy.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Cope with stress.
- Feel better!

Getting Started—Take a Walk!

Many people find it hard to be active for 30 minutes a day, five days a week. But most people can enjoy walking. And most adults can easily break up 30 minutes into two 15-minute walks to fit their busy schedules.

So, find a pair of walking shoes that fit well. Walk for 15 minutes in the morning and for 15 minutes during your lunch break or after dinner. Try this for a week. You may be surprised about how much energy you get from walking.



Other Ways to Be Active

Walking isn't the only way to move your body. Here are some other ways to be active every day:

- Ride a bike.
- Clean the house.
- Wash the car.
- Work in the garden.
- Take the dog for a walk.
- Rake the leaves in your yard.
- Go for a swim.
- Take a yoga or dance class.
- Try an exercise video.

To keep activity fun, vary the things you do. Getting an exercise buddy can help keep you active, too.

Tips for People Who Have Not Been Active Lately

Before you start exercising, talk with your health care team. You may need a stress test. Your doctor can also help you decide which activities are safe for you.

Be sure to tell the doctor about any health problems that you have. Describe the kinds of activities you like and don't like to do.

Here are some other tips to help you get started:

- Start small. Begin with 10 to 15 minutes of activity each day. Add 2 to 3 minutes a week as you work your way to 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days per week.
- Always take a few minutes to warm up before being active. Try walking slowly for 2 or 3 minutes.

Four Keys to Safe and Comfortable Activity

- Drink plenty of water. Drink before, during, and after you are active (unless your doctor has told you to drink less).
- Make sure you can talk and breathe when you are active.
- Wear a medical ID bracelet.
- Wear shoes that fit well.



Tips for People Taking Insulin

If you take insulin to control your diabetes, your blood glucose can drop too low when you are active. Here are some tips to help you stay safe:



- Check your blood glucose before, during, and after you are active.
- Carry a carbohydrate source with you in case your blood glucose drops too low. Choices include glucose tablets, raisins, jelly beans, or juice.
- Continue to check your blood glucose after you stop being active. Your blood glucose can drop several hours after physical activity.
- Learn how to adjust your insulin dose and food for activity. You may need less insulin or more food when you are active, or you may need to adjust both food and insulin.

Tips for People Taking Medications

Some diabetes medications (meds) can also cause blood glucose to drop too low during or after activity. You may need to lower your dose, eat extra food, or carry a carbohydrate source with you.

Ask your health care team whether your meds can cause low blood glucose. They can explain what you can do to keep your blood glucose steady.

Safety Cautions

Although an active life is usually a good idea, there are times when activity is not safe.

- Don't exercise outdoors when the weather is very hot or very cold.
- If you have type 1 diabetes and your blood glucose is above 240 mg/dL, check for ketones in your urine. Do not exercise if you have moderate to large ketone levels. Talk with your health care team about what you need to do if you have ketones.
- If you have type 2 diabetes and your blood glucose is above 400 mg/dL, get your blood glucose under better control before you get active.
- If you have chest pain, are short of breath, or feel dizzy, don't exercise. See your doctor.