

## **Diabetes Outline for Parents**

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## Things to Know as a Parent with a Child Who Has Diabetes

As a parent of a child who has diabetes, it may seem overwhelming at times to know how to handle your child's condition. This online guide is meant to point out key things you need to know that will help you have more confidence. You will find more detailed information about diabetes in diabetes section for teens and young adults in a different part of this website. Here are the main topics this will cover:

- Know how to help your child manage their diabetes
- Know how to help your child stay healthy
- Know how to help your child succeed in school
- Know how other parents deal with your situation
- How to deal with the feelings about diabetes
- Where to find help



*Picture from diabeticrockstar*

At any point, if you have questions about any of the information listed in this module, be sure to contact your child's doctor or community healthcare worker (CHW) so you can understand more!

## Success Factors for Daily Life With Diabetes

- **Be consistent.** Set clear expectations and routines for daily diabetes care. Don't let your child's bargaining, tantrums, or pleading ("Can't we skip the blood sugar check, just this once?") change what you do. Once your child learns that the routine is non-negotiable, he'll stop fighting it.
- **Communicate.** Everyone who cares for your child should be told about his diabetes and how to recognize and treat blood glucose lows. With your spouse, partner, or "ex," work out a consistent, unified approach to daily diabetes care. Attend your child's doctor appointments together, if you can. Open communication and a shared approach to parenting are important.
- **Take breaks.** Diabetes can put extra stress on daily life. So find healthy ways to take a break from the grind. Plan family outings. Keep up with "date nights" or special nights out with friends. For longer breaks, check into diabetes camps—or train others to handle diabetes care so you can get a way for a night, a weekend, or a few days.
- **Be patient.** It's not easy to absorb medical information while you comfort your child and cope with your own feelings about the diagnosis. Also, diabetes is complicated. It takes time to understand what it is and what it means for daily care. So be patient. Take notes. Ask questions. Little by little, you'll master the skills and information you need.



*Picture fromnewsworks.org*

## Overview of Diabetes

Proper diabetes management helps children live fully healthy lives and stay out of the emergency room. Here are some key topic areas you should be familiar with to manage your child's diabetes:



*Picture from inside.akronchildrens.org*

- 1. Understand your child's medication.** This includes knowing how much insulin they take, if any. Also knowing about glucagon, which is a medicine that can be given during an emergency when your child's blood sugar is extremely low.
- 2. Monitor your child's blood sugar level.** Knowing when your child is hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) or hyperglycemic (high blood sugar) is very important. It is even more important that you know what to do if your child is experiencing either of those blood levels.
- 3. Help your child eat healthy and exercise.** Helping your child with eating complex carbs with lots of fruits and veggies will help your child stay healthier. Physical activity is also important to the body especially the heart.
- 4. Educate everyone who cares for your child** so they understand how to manage your child's diabetes. This means taking the time to talk to your child's school and also any adults that will care for your child.

Remember, you can find more detailed information about these diabetes topics and more in diabetes section for teens and young adults in a different part of this website.

## Your Child's Role in Diabetes Care

As your child gets older, it's important that he or she play an active role in meeting their health care needs. They should depend on you less and less as time goes by. Here's an overview of what can be expected as your child grows older:



*Picture from thenational.net*

### 3 to 7 Years Old

- Parents/guardians must do all care
- Gradually learns to cooperate for blood glucose tests and insulin injections
- Inconsistent with food choices; may still need to give injections after meals
- Gradually learns to recognize low blood glucose
- Adult needs to do all insulin pump management if child has one

### 8 to 12 Years Old

- Can learn to test blood glucose and recognize and treat low blood glucose
- At age 10 or 11, can draw up and give injections, although may still need supervision
- Can make own food choices; can learn initial carbohydrate counting
- Does not appreciate that doing something now (e.g., controlling blood glucose levels) can help prevent problems later (e.g., diabetes complications)
- By 11 or 12 years, can be responsible for remembering snacks, but may still need assistance of alarm watches or parent/guardian reminders
- Can do own insulin pump, but needs adult help to remember and calculate

### 13 to 18 Years Old

- Capable of doing the majority of injections or insulin pump management and blood glucose testing, but still needs parental involvement and review to make decisions about dosage
- Knows which foods to eat; can do carbohydrate counting
- Gradually recognizes the importance of good blood glucose control to prevent later complications

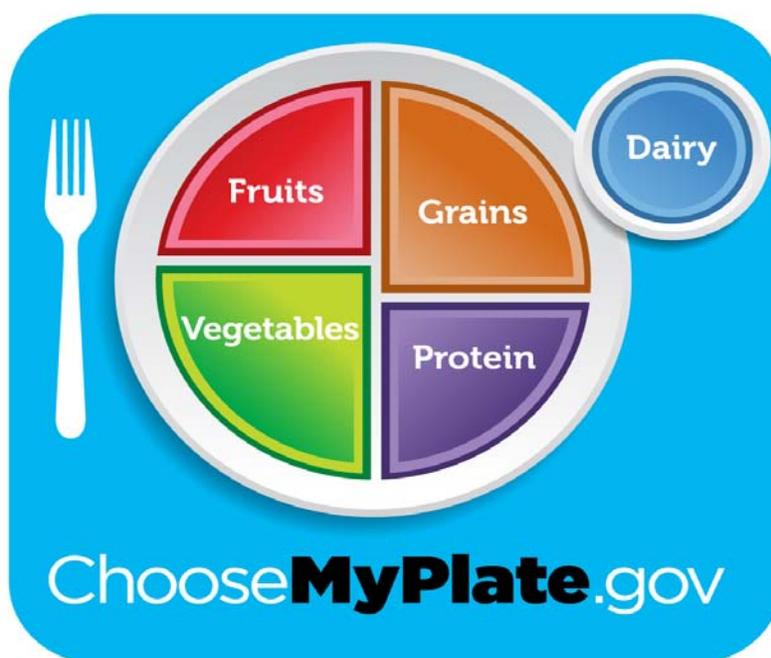
## Learning About the Disease

One of the best things you can do to help your child be more independent about their health is to teach them about sickle cell and help them to understand what's happening inside their bodies: Here are some websites that focus just on teaching kids and teens about diabetes: [National Diabetes Education Program](#), [Think Like a Pancreas](#), [Medikidz](#), and [Kidshealth](#)

## The Basics of Eating Well with Diabetes

Overall, you should keep in mind these main points when preparing food for your child:

- **Eat a variety of foods.** This is the best way to make sure your child is getting the energy, vitamins, and minerals they need to grow, play, work, and stay healthy.
- **Try to stick to a schedule.** Have your child eat their meals and snacks at about the same time every day, and not “graze” in between.
- **Pay attention to carbohydrates** (carbs) in meals and snacks.  
Food is made up of three main nutrients: fat, protein, and carbohydrate. Of these, carbs have the biggest effect on blood glucose. For this reason, your child needs to match their insulin intake to their carbohydrate intake (“cover” your carbs). They can do this by carefully measuring your insulin doses and counting carbs in your meals and snacks.



For more information about carb counting, see Lilly’s **Guide to Carb Counting for Children with**

**Diabetes:** <https://www.idf.org/sites/default/files/attachments/HI62553-Carbohydrate-Counting-for-Children.pdf>

**Tasty recipes for People with Diabetes and Their Families** offers some great food

ideas: <http://ndep.nih.gov/publications/PublicationDetail.aspx?PubId=131>

## Diabetes and Exercise

Physical activity helps your child stay healthy. Physical activity is especially good if your child has diabetes because it

- helps your child reach or stay at a healthy weight
- helps insulin work better to lower your child's blood glucose levels
- is good for your child's heart and lungs
- gives your child more energy



Even small amounts of physical activity help manage diabetes, such as when your child is physically active at school or home.

Children and adolescents with type 2 diabetes who are 10 to 17 years old should aim for 60 minutes of activity every day. Not all physical activity has to take place at the same time.

*Picture from xickle.com*

Increase daily activity by decreasing time spent watching TV or at the computer. Children and adolescents should limit screen time not related to school to less than 2 hours a day.

Children and adolescents with diabetes should

- always talk with a doctor before starting a new physical activity program.
- do **aerobic** activities, such as brisk walking, which use the body's large muscles to make the heart beat faster. The large muscles are those of the upper and lower arms and legs and those that control head, shoulder, and hip movements.
- do activities to strengthen muscles and bone, such as sit-ups or lifting weights. Aim for two times a week.
- stretch to increase flexibility, lower stress, and help prevent muscle soreness after physical activity.

Many activities can help your child and your family stay active and have fun. Consider activities that they might enjoy and can stick with, such as

- playing basketball
- dancing to music with friends
- taking a walk or a bike ride

## Doctor Visits

One form of prevention to make sure your child stays as healthy as possible is to have regular and consistent check ups with your child's doctor. Here is an overview of the tests that should be taken and when:



*Picture from shutterstock*

### Every 3 Months

- Regular doctor's office visit
- A1C blood test-Every 3 months if your blood sugar (glucose) number is too high
- Blood pressure check
- Weight check
- Foot check

### Every 6 Months

- A1C blood test-Every 6 months if your blood sugar (glucose) number is good
- Teeth and gums exam by your dentist

### Every Year

- Physical check-up (exam) by your doctor
- Complete foot exam
- Check cholesterol and other body fats (lipid profile test)
- Complete (dilated) eye exam by an eye doctor
- Flu shot
- Kidney tests

## Where Can I Give Insulin?

If you are a parent who has to give your child a shot of insulin, sometimes it's hard to know which spots are best. Here are a couple of images to help you remember depending on the age of your child:

### Bigger Kids and Teens

**Use the Tummy most often.**

- ▶ easy to reach
- ▶ insulin works at a smoother rate
- ▶ good to use if exercise is planned



**Arms and legs are OK but...**

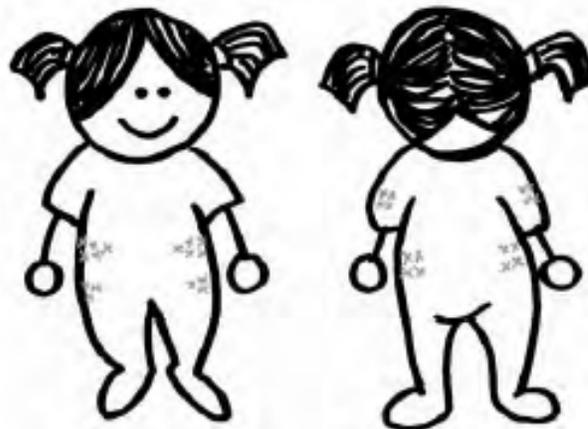
- ▶ arms are hard to do by yourself
- ▶ exercise with arms or legs can cause insulin to work too fast

### Babies and Little Kids

Use all the areas: arms, legs, tummy and bum

**Tummy**

- ▶ not too close to the belly button



**Bum**

- ▶ not the part you sit on

## What Do I Need to Do When My Child Is Sick?

1. **Supervise your child during illness. Even teens need help.**
2. **Check blood sugars every 2-3 hours.** This will help warn you early of possible problems. Check often if your child is vomiting.
3. **Never miss an insulin dose.** Always give some insulin even if your child is not eating as much as usual
  - a. You may need to give less insulin than usual depending on your child's blood sugar level.
  - b. Call for advice on how much insulin to give
4. **Give your child plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration**
5. **Call your doctor if you need help or need more information.** You may need to take your child to the doctor



*Picture from ivillage.com.au*

## Success at School

Unfortunately you cannot guarantee all school staff will understand the complications of diabetes so it's important that you take the time to share information with them and train them on your child's case. Depending on the people, it may be a process requiring a lot of patience. Here are a few key points to consider reviewing:



*Picture from imgion*

- Provide specific information about your child (include your child's picture on forms).
- Work with school staff to determine when and where blood testing is to take place.
- Clearly communicate (verbally and in writing) your permission for school staff to call 911 whenever they deem it necessary and to administer glucagon—no questions asked. They can also share medical information for anyone that needs to know
- Provide multiple emergency contact people and phone numbers including your physician.
- Be sure to communicate with school staff any changes that occur concerning your child and his diabetes management.

You may want to provide a school kit to be stored in your child's classroom in case of an emergency. Have enough items in case your child stays at school longer than expected. Things to include would be:

- Vials of your child's insulin, clearly labeled with child's name
- A second glucose meter to keep at school—including batteries and test strips; syringes; One or more glucagon kits (renew each year as they expire)
- Glucose tablets, juice boxes, or another form of fast-acting sugar
- Cake icing or glucose gel; Snacks containing protein, such as peanut butter crackers; mini carb-counting guide (found at most bookstores)

**Your child has the right to get an education that meets his needs.** There is a law (PL94-142) that states the school must provide help if your child needs it. If your child is not doing well in school, talk with her teachers. You may want to ask that he be tested for learning problems. If he has a learning problem, he should get special help so he can learn better. Ask the school counselor for an "individualized educational plan (IEP)."

Your child can also get accommodations through Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) or with an Individualized Health Plan (IHP). Your child can get written approval for different accommodations so that your child has no limitations in treating their diabetes.

## **Take Care of Yourself and Your Other Children**

It can be very challenging to deal with a serious illness that affects someone you love. You may find that your life is more stressful in other areas, such as your marriage, your family, your finances and your own personal life. It is important to take good care of yourself so you can take care of your child.



*Photo from lipstickalley*

Although you may want to devote your whole life to your child, you can't. It won't help her, and it won't help you. Your needs are also important. Find time for your other children, for your partner and for your friends. Also, make time to do things that you enjoy. A short break, even when your child is sick, can give you a lift. Money can be a major concern for parents of children with chronic diseases.

Talk to your doctor or a social worker about your concerns and how to get more information about health care coverage for your child. Be sure to get help if you need it. Reach out to medical staff, friends, family, clergy, support groups or other parents to help you get through hard times. Sometimes you need more than support. You may need to talk to a social worker or psychologist. Don't wait too long before you ask for help!

## **Your Other Children**

Your other children need your attention and care, too. Make time to talk to them and be with them. Try not to miss school or sports events that they are involved in because you are focused on your child with diabetes.

It can be helpful to teach all of your children about diabetes. If they have questions that you can't answer, let them ask the staff at the clinic. Knowing more about the disease will help them feel included.

One of the keys to a healthy family is to treat your child with diabetes like her brothers and sisters as much as possible. Try to use the same system of discipline and rewards with all of your children. Special treatment isn't good for any of them.

## Knowing Where to Find Help

Because every child is different and has different needs, this guide does not give you all of the information you need to know. One very important skill to have as a parent with a child who has diabetes is to know where to go to find help when you need to know more.

A great place to start is with your doctor or community health worker (CHW). Their job is to not only treat your child, but also make sure you both are educated and understand how to keep your child healthy.



*Picture from Dearbornfamilyphysician*

Another place you can look is on the Internet. There are tons of websites that share information about diabetes. You can use a computer, tablet, or even a smart phone to access the Internet and get information quickly. Here are some online communities that provide support groups so you can talk with other parents who have children with diabetes:

- [JDRF's Online Diabetes Support Team](#) website is provided for informational purposes only in order to provide information about type 1 diabetes, and to share the personal experiences of volunteers related to type 1 diabetes.
- [TypeOneNation](#) is a social network created by JDRF for people with type 1 diabetes, their family, and friends.
- The Joslin Diabetes Center has [discussion boards](#) for adults with diabetes, for teens, and for the parents of teens with diabetes. All are moderated by health care professionals.
- [DiabetesTalkfest.com](#) hosts regular chats with some of the leading experts in diabetes.
- [TuDiabetes.org](#) is a program of the Diabetes Hands Foundation and offers an online community where members exchange ideas in blog posts and discussion forums.
- [Glu](#) is an active and diverse type 1 diabetes online community designed to accelerate research and amplify the collective voice of those living with T1D.
- [Diabetes Community Advocacy Foundation](#) uses social media, such as Twitter chats and internet radio shows, to connect people with diabetes and foster support and education.
- [DiaTribe](#) offers research and product news for people with diabetes.
- [DiabetesMine](#) offers news, reviews, guest posts, interviews, videos, cartoons, and Q&A for people touched by diabetes.

## Patient Perspectives

A mother and daughter reflect on their experience with



diabetes: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZef5Ylb\\_ck](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZef5Ylb_ck)



Spoonful offers you a video about family relationships when one child has

diabetes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol4KXIDkIXE>

KidsHealth interviewed their experience with



several parents to get

diabetes: <http://kidshealth.org/parent/videos/diabetes-story-vd.html>

## Learn More Information (References)

If you want to read more about any of the topics in this module, here are the websites where this information is from so you can read more:



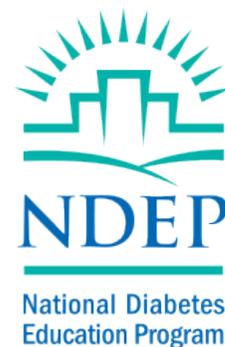
To learn more information about Diabetes in general, **KidsHealth** offers a lot of information that is easy to understand. [Click here](#) to visit their website.

The **Arkansas Diabetes Advisory Council** has a great guide with lots of pictures about so many topics about diabetes. [Click here](#) to get the guide.

**Learning About Diabetes** is an organization that offers lots of basic handouts for different diabetes topics. [Click here](#) to visit their website.

**Intermountain Healthcare** created a guide called Diabetes Basics. You can read it [here](#).

The **National Diabetes Education Program** offers a lot of information for families who have children with diabetes: [Click here](#) to explore their materials.



The [American Diabetes Association](#) provides a section just for families. They also have an [Everyday Wisdom Kit](#) you can get for free that helps you know how to manage your diabetes daily: