

Diabetes Overview

Part of the *Learning to Live Well with Diabetes* Series

Welcome! A diabetes diagnosis can feel overwhelming. There is so much to learn and so much to do. The **Learning to Live Well with Diabetes** series was created to share clear, practical information and resources to offer support without adding extra stress. Setting small, manageable goals over time can help relieve stress and lead to lasting health improvements, and you don't have to do it alone. Please take what is helpful to you on your journey and leave the rest.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact:

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What is Diabetes?



Your body changes much of the food you eat into sugar, also called glucose. Glucose is your body's major source of energy. Insulin is a hormone that helps move glucose from your bloodstream into the body's cells where it can be used.

Diabetes is a condition where your body doesn't make enough insulin or the insulin it makes is not used correctly. Glucose cannot move into the cells as well as it needs to, and too much glucose stays in the blood where it can cause damage. This is called having high blood glucose or high blood sugar.

If diabetes is not well-managed, over time, high blood sugar can damage many parts of the body, like the heart, kidneys, eyes, blood vessels and nerves.

There are many types of diabetes with many different causes and contributing factors. The most common types are Type 1 and Type 2.

What Type of Diabetes do I have?

Type 1 People with type 1 diabetes don't make any insulin and must take it as a shot (injected medication). Type 1 is sometimes called insulin-dependent, and it is more commonly diagnosed in childhood.

Type 2 For most people with type 2 diabetes, their bodies can't correctly use the insulin they make. This is sometimes called insulin resistance. Type 2 diabetes is more common in adults, and risk tends to increase as you get older.



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Key Actions for Managing Diabetes with Less Stress

Managing diabetes can be complicated. There is a lot to learn and a lot to keep track of. The good news is, you do not have to do everything at once and there are people and resources that can offer support. Below are some things that can help make managing diabetes easier.



Visit your Healthcare Provider Regularly

Aim to visit your primary care provider for a physical exam at least once a year. Your provider can help make sure your labs and immunizations are up to date, answer questions, and make referrals to specialists, such as a certified diabetes care and education specialist, registered dietitian or endocrinologist.



Connect With a Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialist (Diabetes Educator)

A certified diabetes care and education specialist, or CDCES for short, can help you understand your diabetes and feel more confident managing it day-to-day. They can help with practical skills like monitoring blood sugar, taking medications and solving challenges. A CDCES can help you create a plan that fits your lifestyle, so diabetes management becomes easier over time.



Set Small, Manageable Goals for Physical Activity

A helpful way to increase physical activity is to set realistic goals that build on each other. Instead of aiming for a big change all at once, start with something you can confidently achieve, like a 10-minute walk three times a week. When that feels comfortable, gradually add time, days or intensity.



Set Small, Manageable Goals for Nutrition

A great way to improve nutrition is to focus on small, manageable changes rather than trying to change everything at once. Start with one or two goals you know you can stick with, like adding a serving of vegetables to dinner or adding fiber or protein to a high carbohydrate snack. Once those feel easy, build on them by adding new habits.



Stay Organized to Keep Track of Regular Diabetes Care

Staying organized makes diabetes management simpler and safer. By tracking blood sugar, medications and meals—and using tools like reminders or pill boxes—you're less likely to miss doses or feel overwhelmed.

A Checklist for Regular Diabetes Management

This basic checklist can help you manage your diabetes by breaking down important aspects of diabetes management by category. You can use the checklist to help you talk about your diabetes with your healthcare team and others who support you in your diabetes care.

Health Care Visits: Your provider should lead these activities

- A review of your full **health history** (annually)
- Screening** to assess mental health and basic needs like food and housing (annually)
- A technology review to make sure you are comfortable using any devices, portals, apps etc. (every visit)
- A **medication review** (every visit)
- A **physical exam** to assess the health of your body, paying extra attention to your feet- you should be asked to remove shoes and socks (annually or every visit)
- A **blood pressure check** (every visit)
- Necessary **immunizations**

Lab Tests: Your provider should order these tests

- Hemoglobin A1c** to assess average blood sugar levels (every 3-6 months)
- Lipid profile** (annually or as advised)
- Liver function tests** (annually)
- Kidney function tests:** (as advised)

Self-Management: These are activities that you lead with support

- Join a **self-management workshop** such as My Healthy Vermont
- Check your blood glucose** before and after eating
- Set small, manageable goals to **enhance nutrition**
- Set small, manageable goals to **increase physical activity**
- Seek support and resources, such as 802 Quits, to **quit tobacco** if you use it
- Talk to your health care provider** if managing your diabetes feels overwhelming
- Schedule a **dilated eye exam** (annually)
- Schedule a **dental visit** (every 4-6 months)

DID YOU KNOW? My Healthy Vermont offers FREE diabetes management workshops. Visit www.myhealthvyt.org to learn more or register.

