



# Living with Diabetes

Experiences and Outcomes in Vermont Adults

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**HealthVermont.gov**  
802-863-7200



## Sources of Information



People with diabetes face constant challenges in their daily lives. These challenges may not always be seen, but those with diabetes feel the constant daily pressures of living with their condition which has a significant and overwhelming impact on their lives that challenge their self-efficacy. To better understand these challenges, the Vermont Department of Health's Diabetes Program collected experiences from 23 Vermont adults 18 and older living with diabetes. Some participated in virtual listening sessions (17), others completed a written survey (6) with similar questions. Their stories show what it takes to be successful in managing diabetes, what makes it difficult, as well as what would help improve their ability to manage their condition.

The purpose in sharing these stories is to:

- Educate and inform Health Department staff and community and clinical partners how to best support and provide care to those with diabetes.
- Give voice to those living with diabetes so that others can know what challenges they face and what they need to stay healthy.

There are eight sections on the following pages. The first provides an overview of diabetes in Vermont. The next six sections represent the main themes identified through the lived experience stories shared with the Health Department by Vermont residents. These themes were identified by examining each person's responses to the interview or survey questions, looking for the common threads within their words. In each of these six sections, a theme is summarized, with representative quotes from Vermont resident's as well as related population health data collected by the Health Department in the [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System \(BRFSS\)](#), a population-based survey of Vermont adults which is used to estimate the rate of health conditions and health-related behaviors at a statewide level. The population health data is used to enhance the narrative of the themes of what it's like managing diabetes in Vermont to highlight the context of that experience at a statewide level. The final section provides an overarching summary of the contents of this report.

### What is lived experience?

Lived experience is knowledge based on a person's situation, perspective, personal identity, and history.

People with lived experience have insights that can inform and improve systems, research, policies, practices, and programs.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact [ahs.vdhdpdiabetesteam@vermont.gov](mailto:ahs.vdhdpdiabetesteam@vermont.gov).

Learn more about how the way these data were collected may impact this report: [www.healthvermont.gov/stats/data-reporting-topic/health-equity-data](http://www.healthvermont.gov/stats/data-reporting-topic/health-equity-data).

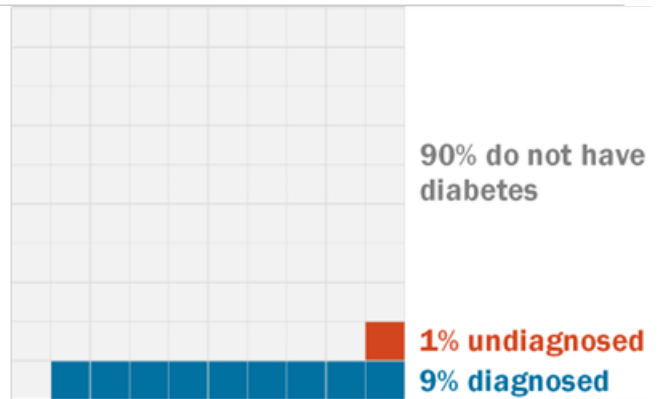
## Diabetes in Vermont



Nine percent of Vermont adults (48,100 people) have been diagnosed with diabetes. More than one in eight (13%) of them have type 1 diabetes, while the majority (87%) have type 2.<sup>1</sup> Between 1988 and 1994, nearly 20% of U.S. adults likely had diabetes but were not diagnosed. Researchers have found that great strides have been made in recent years reducing this to 10% of people with diabetes being undiagnosed, but there are still many living with this condition who don't know it.<sup>2</sup> This means that an additional 5,300 Vermont adults may have diabetes and not know it. State level data on diabetes prevalence among children under the age of 18 is not available. However, national estimates place the current prevalence of type 2 diabetes among American children at 0.1% or about 68,000 kids under the ages of 18<sup>3</sup> and there is evidence that this rate is increasing among kids.<sup>4</sup>



**One in 11 (9%) Vermont adults know that they have diabetes while one in 100 (1%) may have diabetes and not know it.**



Source: BRFSS, 2024

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“We have to focus on managing the **quality** of life and how [we] can live a **full life.**”

- Tabitha

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“I hope people are **still working** toward a **cure.**”

- Michele

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## Affording Diabetes



Vermonters with diabetes tell us that access to the right equipment and medication is essential to proper care. Diabetes creates a financial burden for people with diabetes. The cost of accessing medication, equipment or other resources can simultaneously help as well as disrupt a person's ability to manage their diabetes. However, access is not always easy or guaranteed, even with insurance. They cite that access to equipment and medication today does not guarantee it for tomorrow. Changes in cost or insurance coverage can quickly make necessary things either accessible or inaccessible. As a rural state with limited public transportation options, Vermont adults with diabetes tell us that how far they live from health care, grocery stores, pharmacies, and other support services/resources also impacts affordability in Vermont.

“[...] better access to **affordable** health care, medication and supplies would make a big **difference** because sometimes cost can be a barrier to staying consistent.”

- Mia

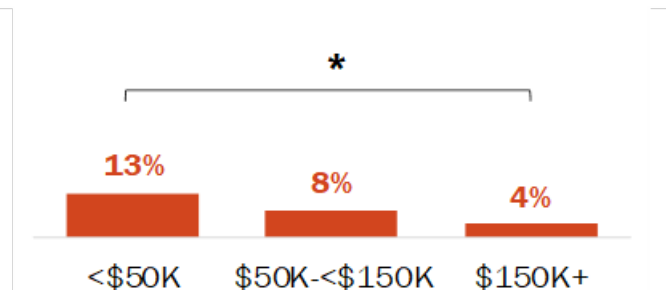
Diabetes prevalence is highest among Vermont adults with household incomes of less than \$50,000 a year (13%) and lowest among those with household incomes of \$150,000 or higher (4%).

Medicare (47%) and private insurance (31%) are the two most common primary types of insurance coverage for Vermont adults diagnosed with diabetes. Fewer are covered by Medicaid (12%) and military insurance (5%). Rates of other insurance types and uninsured cannot be reported due to small numbers.



**7%** of Vermont adults diagnosed with diabetes, about 3,400 people, report **delaying** needed medical care due to cost.

### The prevalence of diabetes statistically increases with decreasing household income.



\*Statistical difference between groups.  
Source: VT BRFSS, 2024

For free **workshops, tools and resources** for managing diabetes, visit the Vermont Department of Health:

[Free Tools and Resources for Diabetes](#)

## Always in the Background



From Vermont residents with diabetes we consistently hear that having diabetes can consume one’s life in many ways, requiring daily effort and discipline. It’s always in the background of daily life and can consume much of a person’s physical time, mental energy, and agency, even for those who find diabetes manageable. This is often a result of the need to learn about diabetes that comes with being diagnosed as well as keeping up-to-date including finding all the care, tools, resources, and support needed to be successful. Understanding and trusting information can be difficult in this age of misinformation, significantly hindering self-management efforts. The daily need to focus on food along with regular exercise, medication and blood sugar monitoring routines, not to mention the need for more frequent medical appointments, is costly and time-consuming.

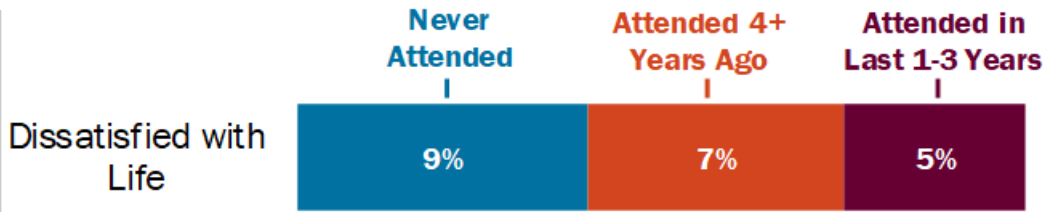
“Diabetes has really taken a toll on me. It has deeply affected my overall health, as it requires **constant** attention, paying attention to my blood sugar levels and daily routine can be somehow **overwhelming** [...] staying on top of it is, it's not just important, it's lifesaving.”

- Clef



**8%** of Vermont adults with diabetes indicate that they are **dissatisfied** with their life.

**The rate of dissatisfaction among Vermont adults with diabetes decreases with diabetes education. Those who took a course on managing their diabetes in the last 1-3 years are the least likely to feel dissatisfied with life.**



Source: VT BRFSS, 2022 & 2024

Diabetes self-management **workshops are available** through My Healthy VT, free of charge. Learn more or sign up or make a referral at [www.myhealthvt.org](http://www.myhealthvt.org)

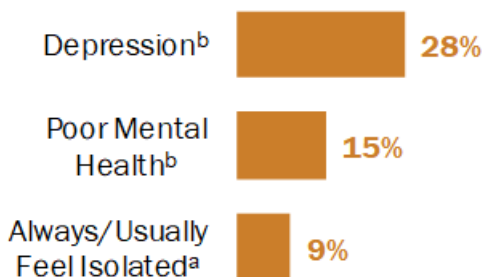
## The Emotional Toll



Even when doing everything right, Vermont residents with diabetes say that managing diabetes can be anxiety inducing and stressful. Simply being told you have diabetes can lead to feelings of embarrassment, isolation, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. Most Vermonters with diabetes tell us they have heard about the stress-insulin resistance connection from a trusted health care provider (see this [article](#)<sup>5</sup> to learn more about this relationship). However, they feel that managing stress is not as much a part of their clinical experience or found in self-management resources as it could be. Diabetes can cause stress and chronic stress can cause or exacerbate diabetes. Managing stress is important to successfully managing diabetes.

- 15%, or about 5,600 people with diagnosed diabetes, usually or always feel stressed, slightly higher than the 12% of those without diagnosed diabetes.
- Stress for Vermont adults with diabetes decreases with physical activity and diabetes education.
- Nearly three in 10 (28%) Vermont adults with diabetes have depression, and one in seven (15%) report having poor mental health.
- 9%, about 3,200 people with diabetes, always or usually feel isolated.

### Many Vermont adults with diabetes report having mental health symptoms.

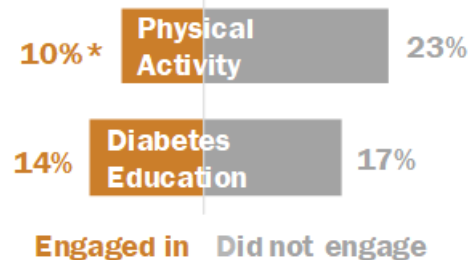


Source: VT BRFSS, 2022<sup>a</sup> & 2024<sup>b</sup>

“My diabetes **can be** very stressful and emotionally challenging and it's **essential** to have like a kind of support system in place.”

- Ria

**Vermont adults with diagnosed diabetes who engage in physical activity or diabetes education are less likely to always or usually be stressed.**



\*Statistical difference.

Source: VT BRFSS, 2022

### Did You Know?

The [My Healthy VT](#) Diabetes Self-Management Program includes strategies for managing stress with diabetes.



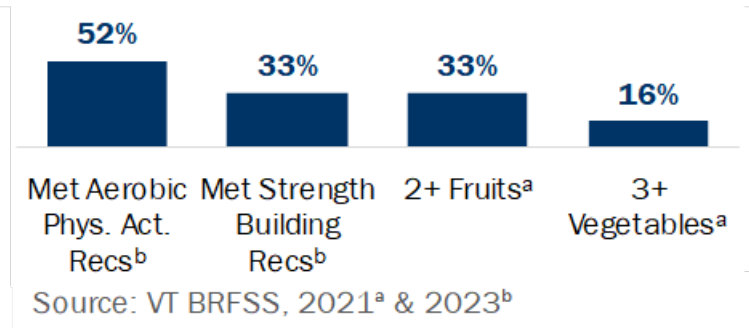
## Increasing Resiliency



Vermonters with diabetes tell us that the most effective and lasting diabetes management comes through empowering individuals to take charge and lead their own care. Individuals who are proactive in their own care tend to have better outcomes and outlooks on life. They say that certain tools and resources do need to be in place to be successful – like access to a knowledgeable health care provider, information about and access to nutritious food/meal plans and opportunities to be physically active in order to make the best choices for their needs and lifestyle. While challenging to create and maintain, Vermonters share that routines are highly beneficial for success.

- Half (52%) of Vermont adults with diagnosed diabetes meet aerobic physical activity recommendations. Only a third (33%) meet strength building recommendations.<sup>6</sup>
- A third (33%) consume the recommended amount of fruits a day. Sixteen percent (16%) consume the recommended amount of vegetables a day.

### Preventive behaviors reducing the likelihood of worsening diabetes outcomes, among Vermont adults diagnosed with diabetes.



Proximity and transportation to resources, such as specialized care and other in-person clinical and lifestyle supports, such as nutritious food and opportunities to be physically active, can also be barriers to empowering individuals to take charge and lead their own care.

- 6% of Vermont adults with diabetes (~2,600 people), lack a reliable form of transportation.<sup>1</sup>
- There are only 23 endocrinologists in the state, providing 11.5 full-time equivalent endocrinology diabetes & metabolism specialists for every 100,000 Vermonters.<sup>7</sup> These providers are spread out across the state, further limiting access regionally, especially for those who struggle with transportation.

“I think [having] **easier** access to personalized support will really help [improve my ability to manage my diabetes], you know, like [nutritionists] or diabetes educators who can **guide** me based on my specific needs.”

- John

Aim to **engage** in 150-minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week plus strength building exercises at least twice a week to **improve** diabetes outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

Check out:

[Physical Activity Basics for Chronic Conditions](#)  
[Vermont Nutrition & Food Access Resources](#)

## Growth Through Learning



From Vermont residents with diabetes we hear that diabetes is a lifelong journey. It is a condition that requires continual physical and intellectual maintenance. Therefore, continuing to learn about it, ways to manage it, and connecting with others with similar experiences is an ongoing process that needs to be encouraged and facilitated. Vermonters with diabetes feel that learning about diabetes empowers them and leads to better outcomes over time. They further tell us that learning about diabetes should ideally be both provider- as well self-led. Vermonters with diabetes often mention the importance of being a consistent life-long learner because new information, treatment options, and management strategies and techniques are always being learned or developed. This makes being a life-long learner incredibly important to long-term health. This is something that not everyone can do on their own, which is why Vermont adults with diabetes strongly feel a need for clinical and peer support to help them accomplish this.

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“[...] **more education** [...] like what tools are available, understanding what they have, what can help them, what can be detrimental and how it affects their long-term health [is something that I think would **help** people better manage diabetes].”

- Jo

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**Nearly half** (48%) of Vermont adults with diagnosed diabetes have ever **taken a course or class** on managing their condition.<sup>1</sup>



**Three-quarters** (76%) of Vermont adults with diagnosed diabetes have had their **A1c tested** at least twice a year.<sup>1</sup>

**Diabetes self-management education and support** services (DSMES) offer people with diabetes comprehensive education to develop the **knowledge** and **skills** needed to effectively manage diabetes.

Health care offices and community organizations can get help to start a DSMES at your site. Visit the [Vermont Department of Health Diabetes Self-Management page](#) to learn more!

## Managing Diabetes Successfully



While having diabetes comes with many challenges, Vermonters with diabetes say it is possible to achieve consistent good health. Vermont residents with diabetes report being able to do this with access to a health care provider knowledgeable about diabetes, as well as personal and community resources such as peer support groups, nutrition plans, and options for physical activity. Though it can be challenging to achieve, Vermont adults with diabetes report that a consistent routine is key to successful management. Those who achieve it say they can recapture their identity. With the right support, resources, and mindset they can have the confidence to effectively manage diabetes long-term, allowing them to have a positive outlook for the future.

- The vast majority (95%) of Vermont adults with diabetes have seen a health care provider in the past year for a routine check-up.
- Three-quarters (75%) of Vermont adults with diabetes usually or always feel they get the social/emotional support that they need.
- Two-thirds (66%) report that their health is good or better. Among those who get the needed social and emotional support, this increases to 71%.

**Successful diabetes management requires support. Many Vermont adults with diabetes receive such support either from their health care provider or others in their lives.**



Source: VT BRFSS, 2024

“I’d say **managing** my diabetes is not easy, but I’ve found like with good discipline and education and right supports, it’s possible to live a **meaningful** life if you’re indeed diligent enough.”

- Dale



The Vermont Department of Health has a series of resources to help people **live well** with diabetes. The resources are broken into topics, so you can focus on one thing at a time. Visit [healthvermont.gov/wellness/diabetes/free-tools-resources-diabetes#llwd](https://healthvermont.gov/wellness/diabetes/free-tools-resources-diabetes#llwd) to access the **Learning to Live Well** with Diabetes series.

## Summary

Though it can be challenging, managing diabetes is possible. Vermont residents with diabetes clearly recognize the importance of diabetes management, they are simply looking for things that can make the day-to-day of having diabetes a little less stressful, overwhelming or time-consuming, or otherwise burdensome, thereby allowing them to live their lives just a little easier. Being part of a community and having not just clinical support but the support of their social circle as well as a peer support group of those with diabetes. Aside from this, access to resources, including medication, medical equipment, nutritious food, opportunities for physical activity, stress management, and a trusted provider knowledgeable about diabetes are things that Vermont health systems and community support services could help with to facilitate health and lifestyle choices for Vermont residents with diabetes, leading to better diabetes management.

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“[...] managing diabetes has really **taught** me strength, discipline and resilience. I have come to see it's not just as a condition I manage, but as a reminder to **care** for myself deeply and intentionally.”

- Pieter

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## References

<sup>1</sup>VT Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 2024.

<sup>2</sup>Fang M, Wang D, Coresh J, Selvin E. Undiagnosed Diabetes in U.S. Adults: Prevalence and Trends. *Diabetes Care*. 2022;45(9):1994-2002. doi: [10.2337/dc22-0242](https://doi.org/10.2337/dc22-0242)

<sup>3</sup>National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), 2023-2024.

<sup>4</sup>Lawrence JM, Drivers J, Isom S, et al. Trends in Prevalence of Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes in Children and Adolescents in the US, 2001-2017. *JAMA*. 2021;326(8):717-727. doi:[10.1001/jama.2021.11165](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2021.11165)

<sup>5</sup>Cleveland Clinic. Stress and diabetes. Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials: Diabetes & Endocrinology. Accessed June 23, 2026. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/stress-and-diabetes>, 2024.

<sup>6</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. How much physical activity do adults need? CDC. Accessed June 16, 2026. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/adults.html>

<sup>7</sup>Vermont Health Care Workforce Census, Physician Census, 2022.

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/document/HSI-stats-prov-phys22-detail.PDF>