

Physical Activity and Diabetes ***(Page 1 of 2)***

Why be active?

Being active is good for everyone but is especially important if you have diabetes because it helps to:

- Maintain good blood glucose levels and improve insulin sensitivity
- Lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of a heart attack or stroke
- Improve blood cholesterol levels
- Reduce excess weight and maintain a healthy weight
- Improve the working of the heart and lungs
- Strengthen muscles and bones and keep joints mobile
- Improve general well-being so that we feel fitter, healthier and happier

No matter what your age or how unfit you are there are huge benefits of being more active.

What types of activities are suitable?

Choose activities that you enjoy and that are convenient and safe for you. Walking is ideal and should not cause any health risk. Swimming, cycling, dancing, housework and gardening are also suitable. These help increase strength, mobility and overall fitness. Other ways to get more active include using the stairs and not the lift or escalator, washing your car by hand, turning off the television and getting out and about. For short journeys walk or cycle rather than use the car. Even if your mobility is poor, you can still increase your activity – armchair activities, gentle walking and stretching all help to increase fitness and mobility. If you have high blood pressure or any eye problems then avoid very strenuous activity or lifting heavy weights, particularly if you have had laser treatment.

How active should I be?

It is important to start very slowly and gradually build up your activity level. Start with 5 minutes and build up week by week until you can manage 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity activity (e.g. walking, swimming, housework or gardening) on 5 or more days of the week. This does not have to be continuous activity – 5 or 10 minutes here and there can be just as beneficial and may be easier to fit into your daily routine.

Physical activity does not have to be 'hard' to be good for you. Moderate intensity activity means breathing slightly harder and feeling warmer, however you should be able to talk and be active at the same time. Always start with a warm-up and finish with a cool down to help prevent injury.

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We ask for information about you so that you can receive proper care and treatment. This information remains confidential and is stored securely by the Trust in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

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Be active, be safe

Physical activity is good for you, however it is important to be aware of your limitations and any safety measures you should take. Always check with your Doctor or Diabetes Team if you plan to take up a new activity. Stop activity and see your Doctor if you feel any discomfort or unusual symptoms brought on by physical exertion. Avoid being active in very hot or very cold weather, as 'hypos' (low blood glucose) are more likely.

Managing hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia

Monitor your blood glucose levels before, during and after activity and take steps to avoid 'hypos'. If you take insulin or certain tablets (e.g. sulphonylureas) always keep fast acting carbohydrate food or drink (e.g. glucose tablets, Lucozade) to hand whilst being active in case you have a 'hypo'. If you take part in vigorous activity or are active for a long period of time then you will need some fast acting carbohydrate food or drink during the activity. Delayed 'hypos' (up to 36 hours) can occur as the muscles re-fuel after activity. Extra carbohydrate food may be needed after you have finished being active and at bedtime. Note: hypos are unlikely if you have Type 2 Diabetes that is treated by diet, Metformin or Glucobay alone. However you may need to eat soon after you have been active.

If you are unwell or your blood glucose is greater than 15 mmol/l, it is best to delay being active until your blood glucose levels have returned to less than 15 mmol/l and you are feeling better. Do not exercise if you have ketones in your urine.

Food and medication changes for increased activity

If you take insulin or certain tablets (e.g. sulphonylureas) you may need to take extra carbohydrate food or make changes to your diabetes treatment. This will depend on how often you are active, when you are active, how active you are, how fit you are and how long you are active for. If you inject insulin, your injection site should be away from areas used during activity. Discuss your food and medication needs for your physical activities with your Doctor and Dietitian or the Diabetes Team who will be able to advise you.

Foot care

Invest in some proper footwear. Check your feet before and after activity for any sore areas or blisters. Make sure that you keep your feet clean and dry by changing your socks after being active (see foot care leaflet "Looking After Your Feet").

Drinks and physical activity

If you are going to be active for 30 minutes or more, it is important to drink plenty of water or sugar free squash during and after activity, especially in hot weather. Sports drinks can be useful for some people on insulin therapy who are very active for long periods of time. They are not necessary for most people with diabetes and can cause blood glucose levels to rise too high. Ask a Dietitian for advice on which drinks are suitable for your activity.

For further advice on physical activity contact your Doctor or the Diabetes Team.

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