

# Coping with diabetes



A handbook for women with  
diabetes and their families



**5**

**Steps to  
emotional  
well-being**



## Sometimes, living with diabetes can be unpredictable.

- ✓ You watch your diet.
- ✓ You check your blood glucose levels.
- ✓ You take your medicine.

Still, you can't be sure what each day will bring. Sometimes, everything is great. Other times, you just can't keep things under control. Your blood glucose may get low. You don't feel well. You have to change plans you made months ago.

Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, your blood glucose levels go higher than they should. You worry. You ask yourself:

- Am I doing a good job managing my diabetes?
- Will I have serious complications?
- Will I become a burden to my family?

**The good news** is that you can get through the bad days and enjoy the good ones! This booklet will help you create a framework for success. You will learn how to reduce stress and anxiety. You will get practical tips to help you manage the emotional challenges of diabetes.

# Diabetes & Stress

## EFFECTS ON YOUR BODY AND MIND

**S**tress makes it harder to manage diabetes because it changes how your body works. When you're stressed, your body responds by releasing glucose into your bloodstream. If you don't have diabetes, this extra glucose gives you the energy boost you need to respond to stress. If you have diabetes, your body may not produce enough insulin to use the extra glucose, so you end up with too much glucose in your bloodstream.

### Long-term effects of stress

If your body continues to release too much glucose for a long time, then your blood glucose levels may stay high. This often happens after you have surgery or if you have an infection. Ongoing stress and high blood glucose levels can occur if you have a demanding job or a chronic physical problem.

You might also get stressed when your diabetes seems out of control. For instance, just seeing that your blood glucose levels are high can make you stressed—and make your blood glucose levels go even higher.

### Everyday stresses add up

Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, your blood glucose levels don't stay in your target range. That's not surprising. So many things can affect your blood glucose—and not all of them are within your control. Having your period or being pregnant can affect your diabetes, as can variations in insulin absorption, or differing levels of physical activity or food. Daily inconveniences, like being stuck in a traffic jam, can make stress levels rise and cause your blood glucose levels to go up.

If low glucose levels make you irritable, you may say things you

regret. This may also make you feel stressed.

### When good things cause stress

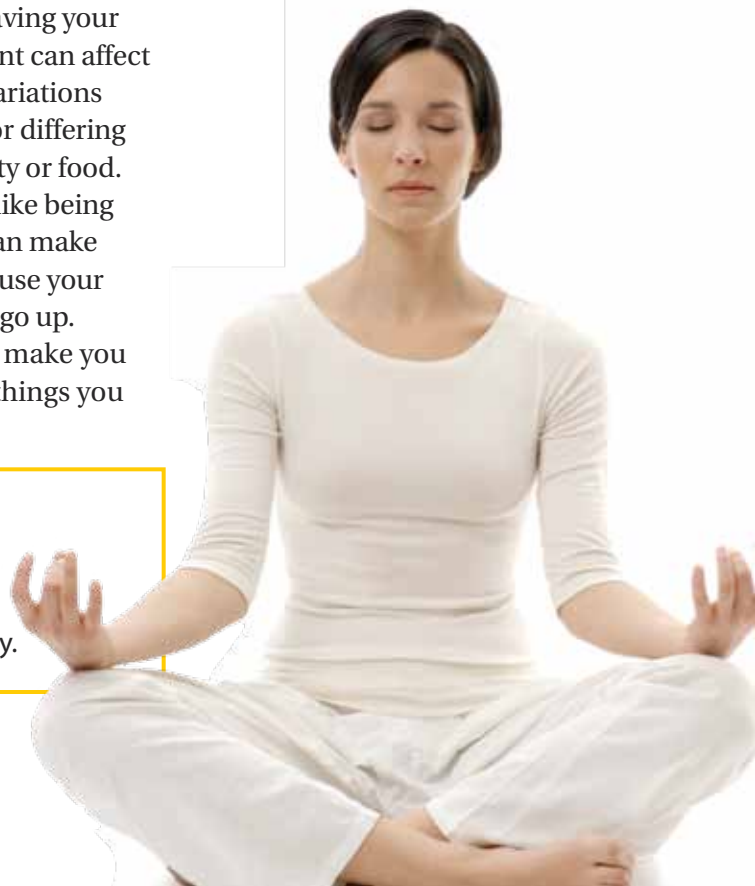
Good things can cause stress, too. For instance, you might be planning a special family dinner over the holidays. Just getting everything ready can make you stressed.

All of us experience emotional upsets and stress. We will always have tough days at work and at home. You can't get rid of stress.

**But you can learn to manage it!**

### HOW COMMON ARE DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY?

- More than 1 in 10 people with diabetes have depression.
- Depression is twice as common in women as in men.
- About 4 in 10 people with diabetes have symptoms of anxiety.





# 5

## Steps to emotional well-being

Use this guide to help you reduce the emotional toll of diabetes.  
**YOU CAN DO IT!**

### STEP 1

Page 4

Think about the things that make you upset, anxious, or depressed. Write them down. You can share your concerns with your health care provider, friends, and family.

### STEP 2

Page 6

Build your support system. Friends and family can help you cope with things that upset you. They can help you reduce your levels of stress and emotional upset.

### STEP 3

Page 7

Work with your health care provider to get the services you need.

### STEP 4

Page 9

Make some small changes in your life.

### STEP 5

Page 11

Use available resources to help you manage your diabetes and your emotions.



Simple strategies  
to boost your mood

PAGE 9

## STEP 1 What makes you upset?

**Do you feel stressed out, upset, or burned out? The checklist below will help you see how well you manage stress. It will help you answer important questions like these:**

- What causes stress in my life right now?
- How does stress affect my body?
- How do I manage my stress?
- Do I have symptoms of serious conditions, such as depression, that need prompt medical attention?

You can share this information with friends or family. They can help you manage some things that cause you stress. For instance, if you don't have any time to yourself because you have small children, a friend or family member may be able to take care of them one evening a week.

**Take this tear-out sheet with you** when you visit your health care provider. It will provide valuable information about your stress level and how you manage your diabetes and your stress.



TEAR-OUT SHEET

### What stresses me out?

■ I feel most stressed out by these 3 things:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### How do I deal with stress?

■ I feel overwhelmed (check one):

- All the time
- A few times a day
- A few times a week
- Occasionally

■ When I feel overwhelmed or upset, I (check all that apply):

- Go to sleep
- Watch TV
- Eat snacks
- Eat a lot
- Keep trying
- Talk to a family member
- Talk to a friend
- Play with my kids
- Other (fill in) \_\_\_\_\_

■ I have enough time for myself:

- Yes
- No

■ I get romantic with my partner— with or without intimacy:

- A couple of times a week
- Occasionally**
- Never**
- I don't have a partner

■ I take my medications exactly as prescribed:

- Always
- Most of the time**
- Rarely**

*Did you check any of the items in red? If so, you may need help in managing your stress.*

### Do I have physical symptoms of stress?

Stress can also affect your body. You may be stressed if you have these symptoms:

■ I clench my teeth or jaw.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

■ I feel tired.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

■ I have an upset stomach.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

■ I have diarrhea.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

■ I sweat a lot even when I don't exercise.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

■ I have a lot of headaches.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

■ I feel tight and stiff in my shoulders or neck.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

■ I clench my fists often.

- Yes, every day
- Yes, sometimes
- No

*Did you answer "Yes, every day" to any question? If so, you may need help in managing your stress. These symptoms could also be due to a physical problem, so talk to your health care provider.*

CONTINUED ►

## Do I have symptoms of depression?

Depression is a serious condition. Some people who have diabetes also have depression and may not realize it. Use this checklist to identify symptoms of depression.

Over the past 2 weeks, I have:

**I cried a lot even when there is no reason.**

Yes  No

**I been very upset over small problems.**

Yes  No

**I stopped doing things that I enjoy.**

Yes  No

**I lost interest in sexual activities with my partner.**

Yes  No

**I been really tired during the day.**

Yes  No

**I had trouble sleeping or getting out of bed in the morning.**

Yes  No

**I felt like I'm not worth anything.**

Yes  No

**I felt guilty about things.**

Yes  No

**I had problems doing small jobs, making simple decisions, or remembering things.**

Yes  No

**I just wanted to be alone a lot.**

Yes  No

**I started eating too much or eating very little.**

Yes  No

**I felt really nervous, restless, or unable to sit still.**

Yes  No

**I had thoughts of hurting myself or ending my life.**

Yes  No

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may have serious depression. Call your health care provider.

**Sometimes, depression can be so severe that people think about hurting themselves. If you...**

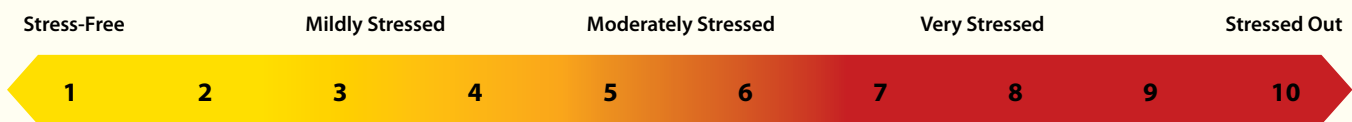
- feel that life is not worth living
- act reckless with your diabetes management or are engaged in risky activities—seemingly without thinking
- see no reason for living or have no sense of purpose in life
- are threatening to hurt or kill yourself or are talking about wanting to hurt or kill yourself

**then you can get help by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK. This free and confidential service is available to anyone in a suicidal crisis or emotional distress.**



TEAR-OUT SHEET

**Often, we're stressed about things that we don't notice.** These stressors seem part of everyday life. But they can make your diabetes harder to control. To see if there's a connection between your blood glucose levels and stress, try this simple test. Before you check your glucose levels, ask yourself, "How stressed am I?" Use the scale below to illustrate your stress level.

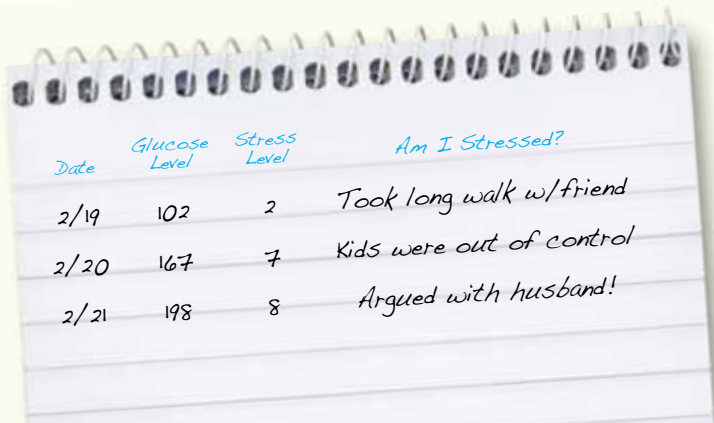


**Next time you record your glucose level,** write the number that corresponds to your stress level next to your glucose measurement. Think about what is making you stressed. For example, are you thinking about family problems or money issues? Write down what bothers you. Did you do anything different today? Did you eat new foods? Did you change your exercise routine? Did you miss taking your medication (if so, why)? Did you do anything today to reduce stress? Maybe you had a great time with your kids, friends, or family. Did you attend a program for weight loss, exercise, or nutrition? Did you attend a diabetes support group meeting? Write it down.

**Try this for 2 weeks.** When you look at the results, do you see a pattern? If you have high glucose levels in certain situations, add them to your list of things that

stress you out (see page 4). This diary will also let you see what you do each day to manage your diabetes. You can feel proud of what you've accomplished. You can also see where you need to improve your efforts.

**When you visit your health care provider, take your logbook with you.** It will provide important information concerning how you manage your diabetes, your levels of stress, and other mood concerns.



## STEP 2 Build your support system

You can reduce your stress by talking to friends and family. This network of people is often called a *support system*. The people in your support system want you to succeed in managing your diabetes. They want to help.

Ask yourself, who is in my support system? The first step is to make a list. Some of the people may live nearby. Other people may live far away. You may not see them or talk to them very often, but you still feel close to them.

If you don't have a support system, create one. Here are some examples of people you might include:

**Your family, friends, partner, and siblings.**

**Your diabetes educator.** He or she may also know about local support groups or organizations that you could join for no or low cost. See the list of resources in the yellow box for support groups you can contact today.

**Members of Internet groups** such as the American Diabetes Association online communities (go to: <http://www.diabetes.org/> and click on Message Boards).

**Your minister** or religious leader at your church, synagogue, mosque, etc.

Once you build your support group, you will have more people to help you manage your diabetes. You can call them when you get worried about your diabetes management or your stress.

Sometimes just talking to people about what bothers you can lower stress. Here are some ways to get your support system working for you.

### Get them involved

If you're not sure how to use your support system, there are many ways to get them involved. They can help you succeed in managing the physical and emotional aspects of diabetes.

### Ask them out

Invite members of your support system to your diabetes education classes. They will learn about diabetes and how it affects you. For instance, this will help them:

- See how hypoglycemia can affect your moods
- Learn why you need to be so careful about what you eat
- Understand how many daily tasks are involved in diabetes management

### Show members of your support system how hard you work

Let family and friends see how much you have to think about every day. For instance, show them how you:

- Check your blood glucose
- Plan meals
- Count carbohydrates
- Use an insulin pump
- Keep track of your glucose levels

### Get physical

Ask members of your support system to exercise with you. Just going for a 30-minute walk most days of the week can make a big difference in your diabetes control. This will also be a great opportunity to relax and catch up with friends.

### Ask for help

Sometimes just having a little help can make all the difference in managing your stress. If, for example, you feel overwhelmed because you are planning a big family get-together, ask one of your support system members to run a few errands for you.

You and members of your support system can also get help from the American Diabetes Association.

📞 **Call 1-800-DIABETES** (1-800-342-2383) and ask for free booklets and other information to help you and your support system.

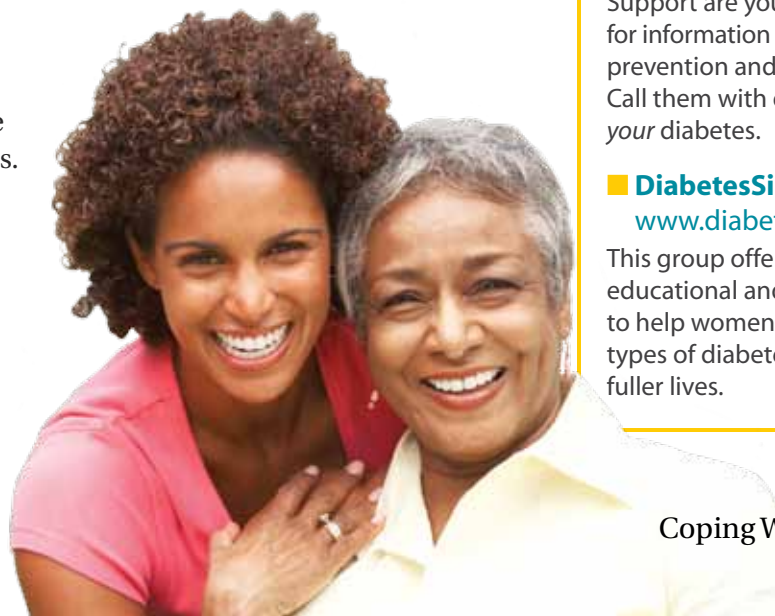
## RESOURCES

📞 **1-800-DIABETES**  
(1-800-342-2383)

American Diabetes Association representatives at the Center for Information and Community Support are your personal guides for information on diabetes prevention and management. Call them with questions about *your* diabetes.

■ **DiabetesSisters**  
[www.diabetessisters.org](http://www.diabetessisters.org)

This group offers a range of educational and support services to help women of all ages with all types of diabetes live healthier, fuller lives.





## STEP 3 Work with your health care provider

Your health care provider can help you manage your diabetes—as well as stress, anxiety, and/or depression. Some ways they can help you include:

- ✓ Helping you improve your glucose control
- ✓ Making sure you get the right medications
- ✓ Giving you information about support groups and other resources

### Before you schedule your appointment

Get all the information you need for your appointment. Use this list of questions to help you get everything together.

#### Do you have insurance?

If you do, find out what medical services and conditions are covered by your policy. Call your insurance provider and ask about your benefits in these areas:

**Mental health counseling.** What services are covered? Do you need to contact the insurance company for approval before you can see a mental health professional? How many visits to a mental health professional are covered by your policy? What is your copay?

**Diabetes education.** What services are covered? Do you need to contact the insurance company for approval before making an appointment with a diabetes educator? Are classes in nutrition or diabetes management covered by your policy? If so, how many are covered? What is your copay?

#### Or do you have Medicare, Medicaid, or no insurance?

Many services for diabetes management are covered under Medicare or Medicaid. For information about these programs and options if you don't have insurance, call the American Diabetes Association's Center for Information and Community Support at ☎ **1-800-DIABETES** (1-800-342-2383). If you have questions about Medicare coverage, call 1-800-638-6833.

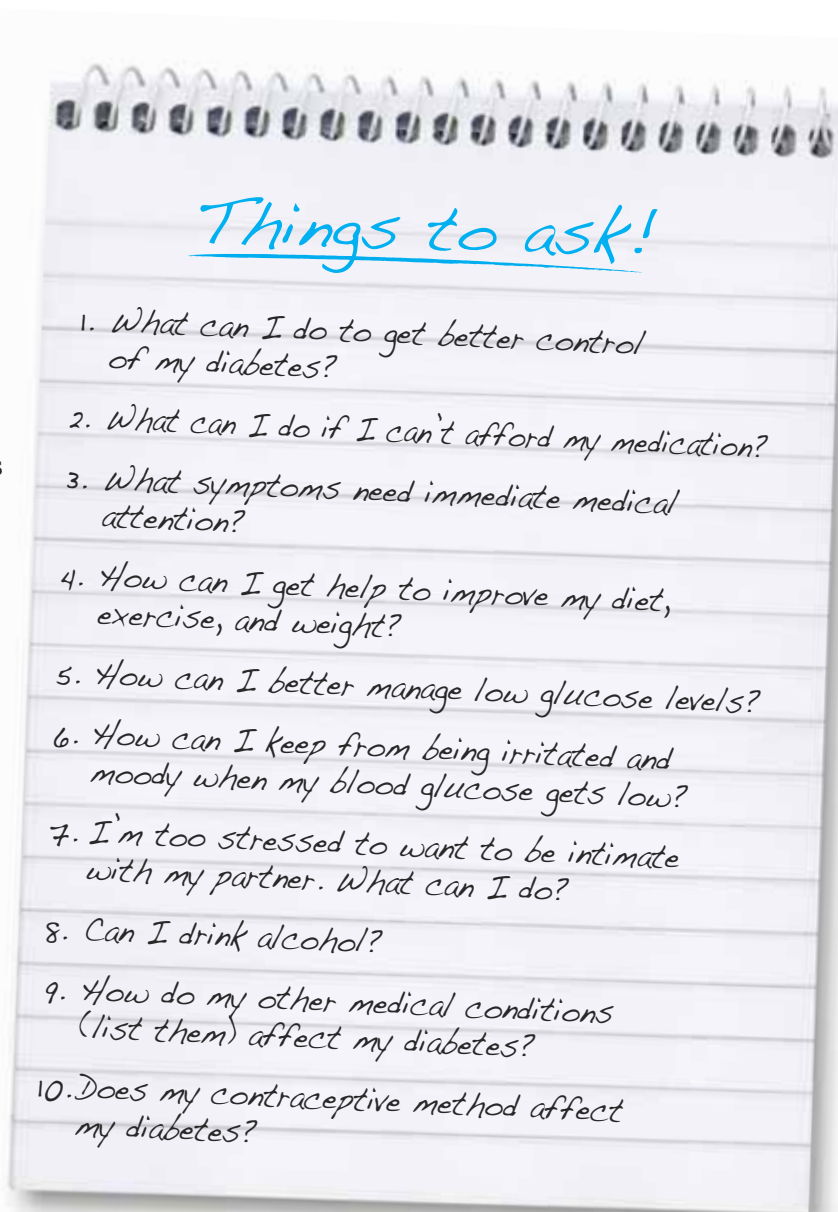
### When you schedule your appointment

When you schedule your medical appointment, you might want to ask questions like these:

- ✓ Can I schedule enough time to talk about my stress?
- ✓ Can I bring a family member, perhaps someone who fixes meals or helps me manage my diabetes?
- ✓ Can I bring a friend to provide support and help me remember what I need to do to control my diabetes?

### Before you go to your appointment

Write down questions you want to ask your health care provider. Bring them with you. Your questions might include:





## What to bring to your medical appointment

It will be easier for your health care provider to help you manage your diabetes if you give him or her as much information as you can. For your appointment, bring these items:

- ✓ The completed checklist on page 4
- ✓ All medications that you are taking
- ✓ All over-the-counter medications (including vitamins, herbs, etc.) that you use
- ✓ Your list of questions

## Going forward

If your health care provider refers you to other professionals, you might want to ask him or her questions about this referral, such as:

- ✓ Why do I need to see this professional?
- ✓ What will this person do for me?
- ✓ How will this help my diabetes?
- ✓ What should I expect?



## PREGNANCY AND DIABETES

If you are trying to become pregnant or are pregnant, you need to pay even more attention to your diabetes management.

### ■ Are you trying to become pregnant?

It is important for both you and your baby that your blood glucose levels are under control before and during pregnancy. Your health care provider and support system can help you.

If you want to get pregnant but are having trouble, you probably feel stressed as a result. Stress can make your diabetes more difficult to control. Diabetes may also be making it hard for you to get pregnant. Diabetes is linked with a condition called polycystic ovary syndrome, or PCOS. If you have PCOS, you may have trouble getting pregnant.

### Symptoms of PCOS include:

- ✓ Irregular periods
- ✓ Acne or hair on your face
- ✓ Dark patches of skin on your neck, under your arms, or on your thighs

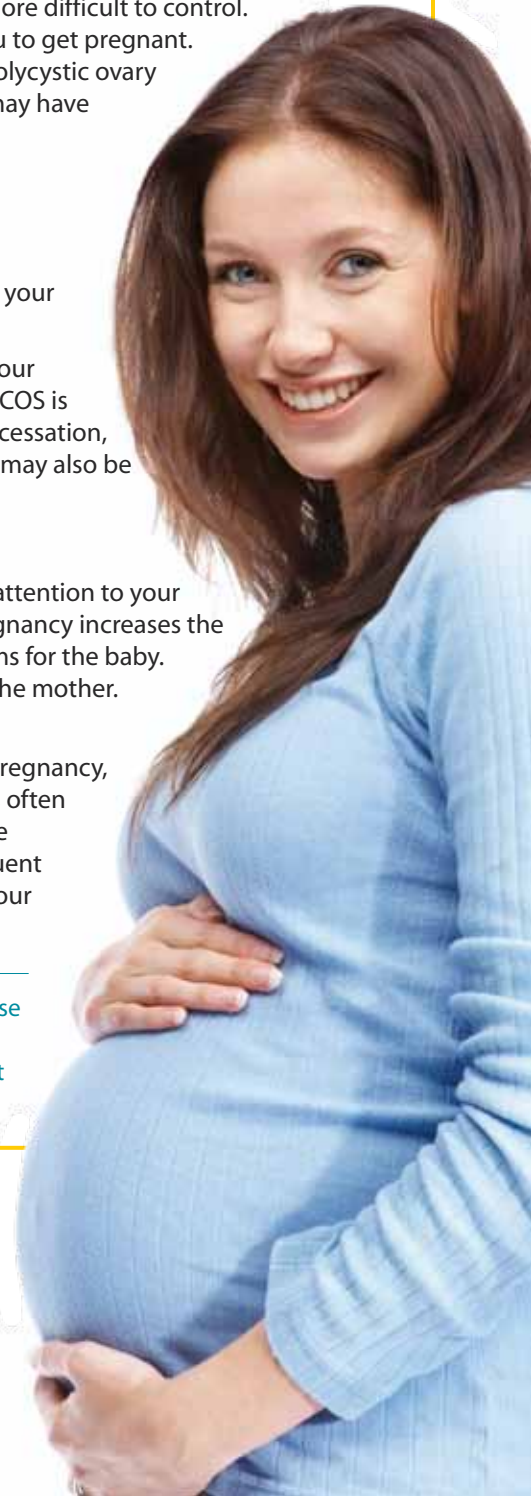
If you think you might have PCOS, discuss your symptoms with your health care provider. PCOS is usually treated with diet, exercise, smoking cessation, and weight loss as appropriate. Medication may also be necessary.

### ■ Are you pregnant?

If you're pregnant, you need to pay special attention to your diabetes. Poor diabetes control during pregnancy increases the chances for birth defects and other problems for the baby. It can also cause serious complications for the mother.

Women who have never had diabetes may develop high blood glucose levels during pregnancy, a condition called gestational diabetes. This often is diagnosed at 24 weeks or later. If you have gestational diabetes, you'll need more frequent medical checkups to ensure that you and your baby stay healthy.

If you do not have a health care provider, please contact the American Diabetes Association at ☎ **1-800-DIABETES** (1-800-342-2383) for a list of recognized providers in your community.



**Don't be shy!**  
Ask questions to get the information you need.

## STEP 4 One step at a time

### HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND YOU

You may meet with different health care providers as part of your health care team. Some of these professionals are described below.

#### ■ Primary care provider

This professional gives you routine medical care, including physical exams, lab tests, and prescriptions for medications. This person may be a doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant.

#### ■ Diabetes educator

He or she can help you manage your diabetes. The diabetes educator teaches you about medications and self-monitoring and can help you develop an exercise program. If you can't get your diabetes under control, you may feel frustrated. The diabetes educator can help you deal with this, too.

#### ■ Mental health professional

This professional may be a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or counselor. He or she will help you manage depression, anxiety, or stress.

#### ■ Registered dietitian

He or she teaches meal planning and nutrition and helps you make healthy food choices. You will be better able to get the nutrition you need, manage your diabetes, and control your weight.

If you do not have a health care provider or if you need to find a recognized diabetes education program, please contact the American Diabetes Association at ☎ **1-800-DIABETES** (1-800-342-2383) for a list of recognized providers in your community.

Each day, there are small steps that you can take to reduce stress and the emotional toll of diabetes. Here are some simple strategies.

#### Take control

When you feel out of control, getting on top of the situation can lead to less stress.

Every time you check your blood glucose, make healthy food choices, or exercise, you are taking control of your diabetes and taking steps to reduce stress.

Each day, think about all the positive things you do to control your diabetes. Make a daily list of all the things you do that say, "I'm in control." Your list might look like this: →

#### Whether you have diabetes or care for someone who does, it is important to:

**Eat sensibly.** The American Diabetes Association offers cookbooks, booklets, and web-based information to help you plan meals, control the size of your meal portions, and count carbohydrates (go to: <http://www.diabetes.org/> and click on Food and Fitness). A great resource is the *What Can I Eat?* booklet, available at no charge by calling ☎ **1-800-DIABETES** (1-800-342-2383).

**Make healthy food choices.** Your goals might include having vegetables twice a day for 4 days in a row.

**Add exercise.** Plan regular exercise, preferably at the same time each day. Ask a member of your support





system to go with you. You can also catch up on each other's news! (Note: Check with your health care provider before you start an exercise program.)

**Add other physical activity.** In addition to regular, daily exercise, think about how you can increase your activity level. You might want to spend more time playing with your children or take the stairs instead of the elevator.

### Advice for caregivers

If you provide care for a family member with diabetes, what can you do to help? First, realize that managing diabetes is difficult for both of you. Studies show that caregivers also get stressed when a family member has diabetes. Use these tips to help both of you.

**Take care of yourself.** You have all the responsibilities of your life, plus taking care of someone else. That can lead to stress. You may have poor eating habits and may not exercise enough.

**Stay positive.** Managing diabetes is hard. Your loved one may feel guilty or ashamed that his or her blood glucose isn't in target, or food or exercise choices aren't always healthy. Praise the many things that they do successfully. If they get upset, try to remember that they're mad at the disease, not at you.

**Offer support.** Ask if your loved one wants company on a walk or trip to the store, or while traveling to a class on diabetes management.

**Let go.** No matter how much you want to see your loved one successfully manage his or

her diabetes, you can only do so much. Let your loved one know that you're available to help, but don't try to force unwanted change.

**Identify the barriers.** If your loved one has trouble with some part of diabetes management, ask about it. For instance, if your husband doesn't want to exercise, ask him why he finds it so unappealing. What would be enjoyable? For example, he may want to go on family walks in the evening. Or your mother with diabetes may have trouble remembering when to take her medications. She may forget that she's taken them. Using a compartmentalized pill box might help.

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## Looking for the Best Books for Managing Your Diabetes?

The American Diabetes Association is the leading publisher of books on diabetes—written by experts to help people with diabetes and their families live healthier lives

[www.shopdiabetes.org](http://www.shopdiabetes.org)





## STEP 5 Use your resources

Use these resources to get more information to help you manage diabetes and the stress it causes.

### American Diabetes Association

Representatives at the Center for Information and Community Support are available at

☎ **1-800-DIABETES** (1-800-342-2383)

to provide support in a number of ways. They can:

- Answer your questions about diabetes
- Refer you to educational programs located near you
- Provide information about events and programs in your community
- Mail you free information about diabetes and nutrition
- Provide information in multiple languages. Just ask

about the language interpreter service.

You can also e-mail your questions to [askada@diabetes.org](mailto:askada@diabetes.org) or chat with a representative at [www.diabetes.org/chat](http://www.diabetes.org/chat).

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A series of short podcasts gives you practical information about:

- Diabetes during pregnancy
- Gestational diabetes
- Diabetes and depression in older women, and other topics

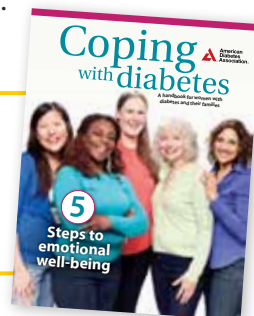
These and other publications and

educational materials are available at [www.cdc.gov/women/pubs/diabetes.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/women/pubs/diabetes.htm).

### Food and Drug Administration Office of Women's Health

Information about diabetes management for women is available in English, Spanish, Bengali, Chamorro, Cambodian, Chinese, Marshallese, Taglish, and Tongan. Go to: [www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ByAudience/ForWomen/](http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ByAudience/ForWomen/) and click on Women and Diabetes.

This booklet was developed by the American Diabetes Association Women and Diabetes Workgroup. To learn more about resources for women, please visit [www.diabetes.org/women](http://www.diabetes.org/women).



**The mission of the American Diabetes Association** is to prevent and cure diabetes and to improve the lives of all people affected by diabetes. **Stop Diabetes®** is the rallying cry that will help us bring our mission—our cause—to the forefront of everything we do.

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Join the Millions<sup>sm</sup>. Visit [www.stopdiabetes.com](http://www.stopdiabetes.com) or call ☎ **1-800-DIABETES**

