



Being Active with Diabetes: How to Get Started

As you may already know, being active improves your health in many ways.

Physical activity can help:

- control your blood sugar
- lower your blood pressure
- help you feel better and reduce stress
- lower your risk of heart disease

It helps to start with an activity that you find to be:

- simple
- something you want to do
- easy to start slowly—and easy to increase a little each week

For most people with diabetes, walking is an ideal activity. Using a step counter or a pedometer can help you keep track of your progress over time. It's also important to try to be more active throughout your day. For example, you may want to try taking stairs instead of an elevator as part of your daily routine—or try parking a little further away from where you usually park.

Be sure to check with your doctor or diabetes care team to see if the activity you choose is right for you. When you begin any new physical activity program, try to check your blood sugars more often so that you know your body's response to the new activity.

Depending upon your health and fitness level, other aerobic options include:

- jogging
- biking
- swimming
- low-impact or chair aerobics
- dancing
- using an elliptical or step machine

Physical activity and diabetes

Remember that some people living with diabetes need to be more cautious before starting a new physical activity program.

Here are some important things to keep in mind:

- Always carry fast-acting sugar sources such as a tube of glucose gel or 3-4 glucose tablets, identification, and your Medic-Alert bracelet, if you have one.
- Stop exercising right away if you are dizzy, have shortness of breath, feel sick to your stomach, or are in pain.
- Drink extra fluids before, during, and after exercise.
- Wear shoes and socks that fit well.

Low blood sugar precautions

If you have type 1 diabetes or if you have type 2 diabetes and take insulin and/or diabetes pills, be sure to:

- Check your blood sugar before and after physical activity. If you use insulin to manage your diabetes, work with your diabetes care team to learn how you might need to

adjust the amount of insulin you use and/or discuss how you might want to change your meal plan to account for the amount and type of activity you plan to do. This is especially important to help you prevent low blood sugars during long periods (over 3 hours) of exercise.

- You may need to eat an extra snack when your insulin or diabetes pills are working the strongest or you are doing moderate to high levels of exercise for over 30 minutes.
- Be aware that moderate to high activity levels can lower your blood sugar right away or up to 24 hours after you have stopped being active.
- If you do *not* take insulin, plan to be active within an hour after eating your meals or snacks to prevent low blood sugars. If you have type 1 diabetes and your blood sugar is less than 120 before exercising, eat 15-30 grams of carbohydrate before you start exercising.
- If you have type 1 diabetes and your blood sugar is over 250, use a urine test strip to check your urine for ketones before you start exercising. Do not exercise if ketones are moderate or high. Ketones are a certain type of chemical that forms in your blood when your body starts to break down fat to use for energy instead of glucose. This happens when you have high blood sugar levels and not enough insulin in your body. When the level of ketones in your blood gets



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too high, your kidneys help to remove it from your blood so it appears in your urine.

What can help you stick with your activity plan?

It may be hard to add activity into your life, especially if you haven't been active lately. Once you have chosen a simple, easy activity which appeals to you and which can be increased gradually, try to:

- Make your activity as regular as sleeping and eating. Mark it on your calendar like any other appointment. You may also want to write it down on an activity goal sheet. (See the “Weekly Plan” below.)
- Connect with someone else to keep you motivated and to make it more enjoyable. Invite a friend to be your exercise partner.
- When you reach your goal, give yourself a reward. Treat yourself to movie tickets, a book, a magazine, a song or album.
- If you get bored doing one activity over and over, try a different activity. Or do different types of activities on different days of the week.
- When it is raining or too cold outside, try doing aerobics or stretching exercises inside where it's warm instead of not doing any activity. You can try walking in an indoor mall, using an exercise video or fitness video game, or dancing.

Other resources

- Visit kp.org/mydoctor to try an Online Health Coach video coaching program. Start today to improve your eating habits and get more active.
- Visit our Web site at kp.org/diabetes. Here you'll find more information about diabetes and other topics.
- Try our personalized online programs at kp.org/healthyliving to get support for your weight loss and activity goals.
- Contact your facility's Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

To help you get started—and keep you going—you may want to use the “Weekly Plan” to set activity goals that you can easily reach.

Weekly Plan

This week, I will _____ (what?)
_____ (how much?)
_____ (when?)
_____ (how many?)

How confident am I that I can follow my plan?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all confident _____ Very confident

How I plan to reward myself:

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.