

Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

HELPING A FAMILY MEMBER WITH DIABETES

When supporting a family member with diabetes, it is important that everyone in the family embrace appropriate lifestyle changes. Those living with diabetes will be more likely to choose healthy habits and behaviors if they are surrounded by friends and/or family who embrace healthy lifestyles. This is important because unmanaged diabetes can lead to gum disease, heart disease, blindness, and nerve and kidney damage. While physical activity, nutrition and proper medication are key components to diabetes management, supporting such practices will also lead to better personal health and well-being for any family member.

Physical activity

To encourage physical activity, you need to move around at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Go for walks, use the stairs, swim, garden, bicycle or dance. It is also important to strength train and stretch. Physical activity will help keep

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Eating as a family can help everyone learn about what to eat, how much to eat and when to eat.

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blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol at healthy levels. Physical activity can also lower the risk for heart disease, stroke, pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes. It can also decrease stress and enhance the health of your heart, muscles and bones, which in turn improves blood circulation, muscle tone and keeps your joints flexible.

Healthy eating and nutrition

Healthy eating is not different for people with diabetes. If you have diabetes it does not mean that you have to eat special foods or give up all the foods you enjoy. It means that you have to eat the right amount of whole grain foods, vegetables, fruits, low-fat or fat-free milk and milk products, lean cuts of meat, fish or poultry and beans each day. Eating as a family can help everyone learn about what to eat, how much to eat and when to eat. Medical professionals can help you with how many meals and snacks you should be eating in a day, especially if you are on medication. What and when you eat will affect how your medicine works. The *Choose Your Food Exchange List for Diabetes*, <http://spectrum.diabetesjournals.org/content/21/4/281.full>, or the *Create Your Plate*, <http://www.diabetes.org/food-and-fitness/food/planning-meals/create-your-plate>, can also help you make appropriate food choices.

Proper medication

Problems related to diabetes self-management can be avoided by keeping blood glucose, or blood sugar levels on target. Sometimes this can be accomplished through proper nutrition and exercise. When it can't, there are medications, specific to



the type of diabetes, personal schedules and other health conditions. Target blood glucose levels are suggested by health care professionals or certified diabetes educators.

As a family member of someone with diabetes, it is important to be encouraging. It is challenging to live with a serious medical condition. Together, it is important to learn all you can about the disease. In addition to the caregiving that accompanies diabetes, it is also helpful to support healthy lifestyle choices that you can make together.

SOURCES:

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- Ingrid Adams, Extension Specialist for Nutrition and Weight Management, University of Kentucky; College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

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