

Fighting Diabetic Complications

Diabetes lasts a lifetime. Poor control of blood glucose (sugar) damages the body. Good control of blood sugar can delay and even prevent diabetic complications.

What Problems Can Occur?

Some common diabetes problems are:

- ▶ Large blood vessel disease leading to heart disease, stroke, or gangrene.
- ▶ Small blood vessel disease leading to eye disease, kidney disease, or gangrene.
- ▶ Nerve problems in the legs, arms, hands, or body organs.
- ▶ Gum disease.

Keeping your blood sugar within the target range acceptable to you and your doctor will help you to fight complications.

What Can You Do to Prevent Complications?

1. **Follow a meal plan that controls calories, carbohydrates, and fats.** You may also need to limit sodium to control blood pressure and limit protein to protect the kidneys. If you have not seen a dietitian in the past 2 years, you need a meal plan checkup. If you are overweight, a 10- to 20-pound weight loss can improve your blood sugar and blood pressure.
2. **Take your medicines as prescribed.** Make sure your doctor knows all the medicines you take. Carry all your medicines with you to each

doctor visit. Discuss them with your doctor. Also discuss over-the-counter drugs and herbs.

3. **See your doctor at least twice a year.** More frequent visits will be needed if you have problems. You will also need regular checkups with the dentist. A yearly checkup with a podiatrist (foot doctor) is smart.
4. **Have a checkup with your eye doctor every 2 years if you are at low risk for retinopathy (diabetic eye disease). If you are at an increased risk for diabetic eye disease, have your eyes examined every year.** Only a dilated eye exam can reveal the changes associated with it. Treating retinopathy as early as possible protects your eyesight.
5. **Check your feet daily for any wounds, red spots, or other changes.** If you cannot examine your feet, have someone else do it or use a mirror. Diabetic nerve damage may prevent you from feeling pain. If a foot wound is not treated, you may get an infection and risk amputation. At each doctor visit take off your shoes and socks so your feet can be examined (even if no one requests you to do so).
6. **Don't smoke.** Smoking cuts off oxygen to the tissues and slows healing. It also increases the risks for heart attack, stroke, and lung disease.

7. **Check your blood sugar often.** Blood sugar monitoring shows you how food, medicine, exercise, and stress affect your blood sugar level. Keep good written records and look for patterns. Your health care team can help you find ways to minimize readings outside your target range.
8. **Exercise with your doctor's permission.** If you have not been exercising, get a physical before you start doing so. A physical exam will find any problems that may prevent you from exercising safely. Regular exercise is great for weight and blood sugar control. Risk for heart disease and stroke will decrease if you exercise.
9. **Learn how to handle sick days.** Fill a sick-day box with supplies you will need. Know when to call for help and what information your health care team will need. Plan to have someone help you at home if you need it. Learn what you should and should not eat.
10. **Learn how to manage stress.** Deep breathing, exercise, talking to a friend, massage, and reading a good book are good stress reducers.

Questions to Answer

1. What can I do this week to reduce my risk for diabetic complications?
2. What other information do I need from my medical team to protect myself?