

Diabetes: How to Manage the Disease as a Senior



Managing diabetes can be a challenge, especially as you get older. To make sure you get the right care, it is important to plan ahead. This will help you stay safe, healthy, and independent. Ask for help with your care when you need it.

Diabetes can lead to problems with your eyes, heart, blood vessels, nerves, and kidneys. Controlling your blood sugar can help prevent these problems. To do this, make sure you stay active, eat healthy foods, take your medicines as prescribed, and check your blood sugar often.

Managing diabetes at home

Your doctor can help you make a written **treatment plan** for managing your diabetes.

The plan should include your medicines, your meal schedule, and when to check your blood sugar. It also should explain what to do in a high or low blood sugar emergency. Keep your plan where you can see it every day.

Home safety

Diabetes can cause nerve damage and vision problems that make you more likely to get hurt. High blood sugar and poor circulation can make it harder for wounds to heal.

To avoid injuries:

- Keep furniture, rugs, and clutter out of the way to prevent falls.
- Turn down the temperature of your hot water heater. Use a bath thermometer or check the bath or shower temperature with a body part that has normal sensation, like your elbow.
- Use pot holders for your hands when cooking.
- Wear shoes and socks that fit well, and do not go barefoot.

If you have problems seeing:

- Use felt-tip markers to label your medicines and record blood sugar results.
- Keep your supplies organized and labeled with stickers or cards big enough to see. Weekly medicine organizers may help.
- Use diabetes vision aids, such as a magnifying lens or a large-print blood sugar meter.

Healthy eating

Eat healthy foods such as whole grains, lean meats, and vegetables. Your meals should give you a variety of nutrients and provide the right amount of calories and carbohydrates.

Your doctor or a dietitian can help plan your meals. If you cannot cook on your own, ask about services that bring healthy food to your home.

Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit

fluids, talk to your doctor before you increase how much you drink.

Sick-day plan

Being sick can cause your blood sugar to rise, which can be dangerous. Talk to your doctor about your diabetes care when you are sick. Here are some guidelines:

- Keep a normal eating schedule and drink extra fluids, like water, broth, and fruit juice.
- Call a doctor if you have been vomiting or have had diarrhea for more than 6 hours.
- Check your blood sugar at least every 3 to 4 hours, or more often if it is rising fast.
- Do not take any over-the-counter medicines without talking to your doctor first.
- If you take insulin, test your urine for ketones every 4 to 6 hours, especially if your blood sugar goes above your target range.
- Check your temperature, breathing rate, pulse, and weight often (at least one time a day) if your blood sugar is more than your target range. Call your doctor if you lose weight or feel dizzy and your breathing rate, pulse, and temperature go up.

Checkups and exams

Regular doctor visits will help prevent problems caused by diabetes. Your checkups should include:

- **Foot exams.** Check your feet daily for blisters, calluses, sores, and numbness or tingling.
- Regular **eye exams** with a specialist. This is to check for vision problems that can lead to blindness. Your doctor may give you an eye exam at every visit.
- **A1c tests** every 3 to 6 months to check how well your blood sugar has been controlled. High blood sugar results in high A1c levels.
- **Dental exams** every 6 months. Ask your dentist about daily gum and teeth care.
- **A urine test** every year to look for signs of kidney damage.
- **Cholesterol checks** to help prevent heart disease. Your LDL, or "bad," cholesterol should stay below 100. Ask your doctor how often to get checked.
- Routine **blood pressure checks** to watch for signs of heart disease. Most people with diabetes need to keep blood pressure below 130/80. Your doctor can help you decide the best and safest blood pressure level.