

Parents: YOU are Key to Helping Your Teen Deal with Diabetes

By Francine Kaufman, M.D.

Chair Elect, [National Diabetes Education Program \(NDEP\)](#)



Parents of teens with type 1 and type 2 diabetes often have concerns about the disease, its impact on their family, and how to keep their teen safe and healthy. The good news is that you can help your teen effectively manage diabetes to ensure their health and well-being now and into adulthood.

About 154,000 young people under age 20 have diabetes in the United States. According to data published in 2006, one in 523 people younger than age 20 has diabetes. Among this group, 79 percent are aged 10 to 19 years. As obesity rates in children continue to soar, type 2 diabetes, a disease that used to be seen primarily in adults over age 45, is becoming more common in teens.

Let your teen know that you're there to help. It's easier to manage diabetes when the whole family works together. Have healthy foods and snacks available, such as fresh fruit, whole grain cereal with low-fat milk, low-fat cheese, and whole grain crackers, to help your teen make smart food choices every day. Avoid keeping a lot of sweets like cookies, candy, or sugar added soda around the house. Select fun physical activities the whole family can enjoy such as riding bikes, dancing, or playing a ball game.

Often, teens with type 2 diabetes become tired of others teasing them if they are overweight, blame themselves or their families for their diabetes, or ask "Why me?" The National Diabetes Education Program has developed [a free series of tip sheets](#) to encourage teens with diabetes to reach out and get support from others, to involve their family and their health care team in their teen's diabetes care needs, and to take action to manage the disease—one step at a time.

Encourage your teen to set goals for a healthy lifestyle:

- Start small and work up to bigger goals. For example: "I will substitute water for juice or soda three times a week." When that's going well, take the next step. Add another goal — "I will dance or bike ride twice a week." Once that goal is met, add a new goal — "I will choose a plain hamburger or kid-size fries."
- Each new goal could be just a bit more challenging. If your teen shoots hoops twice a week, add another activity on three other days.
- Help your teen avoid goals that will be too hard to meet, such as, "I will never drink soda again." Reward goals that are reached – but not with food.

Bethannie Ramirez, a high school senior with type 2 diabetes, offers this advice for teens with diabetes: "It's much easier to accept diabetes and work it into your everyday life than to fight it. Work with your doctor to make your diabetes plan part of your daily routine. Then life doesn't really seem that different."

Effective diabetes management is also critical during the school day. NDEP's [*Helping the Student with Diabetes Succeed: A Guide for School Personnel*](#) explains how schools can better meet the needs of students with diabetes. It is a useful resource to ensure safe and effective diabetes management for your teen in school.

For more information about diabetes in youth, and for free resources that both parents and teens can use, visit the National Diabetes Education Program at <http://www.YourDiabetesInfo.org> or call 1-888-693-NDEP (6337).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Diabetes Education Program is jointly sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with the support of more than 200 partner organizations.