

Dealing with a Diabetes Diagnosis as an Older Adult

by the [National Diabetes Education Program](#)



If you have been told by a health care professional that you have type 2 diabetes, it is normal to feel anxious or uncertain. But you are not alone – almost 10.5 million adults aged 60 and older in the United States have diabetes. Diabetes is serious, but you can manage it. The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) offers tips to help older adults learn to manage diabetes, avoid or delay serious complications, and live longer, healthier lives.

What does a diabetes diagnosis mean to me?

A diabetes diagnosis means that your blood glucose (sugar) is too high. You will need to keep your blood glucose under control to help you avoid or delay serious complications such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, nerve damage, and other health problems.

Your blood always has some glucose in it because your body needs it for energy, but too much is not good for your health. Your pancreas makes insulin, which helps glucose get from your blood into your cells. Cells then take glucose and turn it into energy. If you have type 2 diabetes, the pancreas still makes some insulin but cells cannot use it very well. You may need to take insulin or pills to help your body's supply of insulin work better.

You'll need to take good care of yourself and your diabetes to feel better and stay healthy. One way to help prevent diabetes complications is to manage your ABCs:

- **A is for the A1C test.** It measures your average blood glucose level over the past three months.
- **B is for blood pressure.** High blood pressure makes your heart work too hard.
- **C is for cholesterol.** Bad cholesterol, or LDL, builds up and clogs your arteries.

Ask your health care team these questions so you can know how to manage your ABCs:

- Should I check my blood glucose? If so, when, and how often?
- What should I do if my blood glucose is too high or too low?
- What are my ABC numbers? What should my ABC numbers be?
- Do I qualify for any Medicare benefits that will help me manage my diabetes?
- How can I learn more about how to make healthy food choices and be physically active?
- Where can I learn more about how to manage my diabetes?

Learn how to make small changes to manage your diabetes.

Healthy eating and regular physical activity are keys to good health at any age – especially if you have diabetes. Choose healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, fish, lean meats, chicken or turkey without the skin, dry peas or beans, whole grains, and low-fat or nonfat milk products. If you are unable to cook for yourself, find out about a community program in your area that serves or delivers meals. Call the [Eldercare Locator](#) at 1-800-677-1116 for information on the program nearest you.

Physical activity can improve your strength, flexibility, and balance. Ask a health care professional about ways you can safely increase the amount of physical activity you do. Set

small goals to start until you reach at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week. If allowed, work toward doing strength exercises on two or three days a week – strengthening activities require your muscles to use force against a resistance, such as gravity, weights, or exercise bands. Ask your family, friends, and younger people in your life to help you. They can encourage you, lend a hand with setbacks, and be there to celebrate your successes!

Understand which diabetes benefits are covered by Medicare.

Medicare pays for part of the cost of diabetes equipment and supplies, including blood glucose meters, test strips, and lancets. It also covers diabetes self-management training, which helps you learn how to manage diabetes, and medical nutrition therapy services, which help you learn which foods are best to eat and how much food is right for you. Medicare Part B helps pay for other services such as an A1C test, dilated eye exam to check for diabetic eye diseases, glaucoma screening, flu shot and pneumococcal pneumonia shot, and foot care if you have nerve damage in either foot due to diabetes. Additionally, Medicare Part D helps cover the cost of prescription drugs. Talk to your health care professional about the Medicare benefits available to you and call 1-800-MEDICARE or visit www.medicare.gov for more information.

It is never too late to make healthy changes to take control of your diabetes. For more information about managing diabetes as an older adult, contact the National Diabetes Education Program at 1-888-693-NDEP (6337) or www.YourDiabetesInfo.org and order your free copy of [*The Power to Control Diabetes Is in Your Hands*](#) and [*4 Steps to Control Your Diabetes. For Life.*](#) The [Weight-control Information Network](#) also has free resources to help older adults with weight control and physical activity. To order a copy of [*Young At Heart: Tips for Older Adults*](#), call 1-877-946-4627.

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