



Five Facts About Diabetes

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With so much health information readily available, it's often hard for the 24 million Americans living with diabetes to separate fact from fiction. To help people with diabetes better understand how to manage the disease, the National Diabetes Education Program provides five facts about diabetes.

Fact #1: Diabetes is a serious disease. It can lead to serious complications such as heart attack, stroke, blindness, kidney failure, and lower limb amputations. People with diabetes can take steps to manage it and lower their risk for complications. Make healthy food choices, be physically active, and stay at a healthy weight. Good diabetes care includes managing the ABCs of diabetes – as measured by the A1C test, blood pressure, and cholesterol – to help avoid having a heart attack, stroke, or other problems.

Fact #2: The only way to know for sure what your levels are is to check your blood glucose. The absence of symptoms of high blood glucose is an unreliable guide for judging glucose control, since symptoms do not occur until blood glucose reaches high levels. Diabetes is often called a “silent disease” because it can cause serious complications even before you have symptoms. Set your blood glucose targets with your diabetes care team. Ask your health care team to show you how to self-monitor your blood glucose. Keep a record of your results, and share them with your team. Also, know your A1C goal and keep a record of your test results, which reflect your average blood glucose levels over the past three months. It is the best way to know how well your blood glucose is controlled overall.

Fact #3: Small amounts of foods that contain sugar can be part of a healthy meal plan. If you choose to eat sweet foods, just have a small amount at the end of a healthy meal, not every day, or have a piece of fruit rather than a sugary snack.

Fact #4: A healthy meal plan for people with diabetes is a healthy meal plan for everyone. Eat foods that are high in fiber and low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars. Healthy foods include a colorful mix of fruits and vegetables, fish, lean meats, chicken or turkey without the skin, dry peas or beans, whole grains, and low-fat or skim milk and cheese. Ask your health care team for a healthy meal plan.

Fact #5: Physical activity is safe – and essential – for people with diabetes. Talk to your health care team about ways to safely increase your daily physical activity. Being physically active can help people with diabetes improve their blood glucose, cholesterol, blood pressure, and weight. It also helps improve strength, flexibility, and balance. Start by setting small goals until you reach at least 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. Brisk walking is a good way to move more.

For more information about diabetes, download or order the free [*Tips to Help You Stay Healthy*](#) tip sheet developed by the National Diabetes Education Program at www.YourDiabetesInfo.org or call 1-888-693-NDEP (6337); TTY: 1-866-569-1162.