

Diabetes and Exercise

The benefits of exercise are vast and varied. Regular exercise improves heart function, aids weight loss, builds bone and muscle strength and has a positive effect on stress levels and moods. But should you be exercising if you've been diagnosed with Diabetes and what type of exercise should you be doing?

Will exercise help with my diabetes?

The answer is, YES and here's how...

- Exercise increases the body's sensitivity to insulin.
- Exercise enhances the more efficient use of blood glucose, thereby lowering it. It also possibly reduces the amount of medication needed to treat diabetes. With type 2 diabetes, it may even eliminate the need for medication, when accompanied by a healthy eating plan.
- Exercise has the ability to reduce your cholesterol levels and high blood pressure, and in the long term can reduce the development of heart disease or stroke. This is important because diabetic individuals have a higher risk of developing heart and circulatory problems.
- Exercise, when accompanied with a well balanced diet, can help reduce your body fat (especially abdominal fat), since it burns extra calories. This is of particular importance to the overweight diabetic.
- Exercise can improve your circulation, especially in the arms and legs, where people with diabetes can have problems.
- Exercise helps to reduce stress levels, which can raise your glucose level.
- Exercise can improve the quality of life of diabetics.

What type of exercise should I be doing?

Cardio exercise has been shown to have the greatest effect on people with Diabetes. Cardio exercise such as walking, cycling, swimming or jogging should be done at an intensity that your heart rate and breathing rate are elevated but you should still be able to manage a conversation comfortably.

You should aim to do your cardio at least 3 times a week and build up to 5 times a week. Start with just 10min of cardio exercise at a time and add 5min every 4 weeks until you reach 30 or 40 minutes of continuous cardio exercise.

Remember to warm up and cool down sufficiently to prevent injury. Stretching is an important to add to your warm up. Light weight training can also be incorporated into your exercise regime once you start getting a little fitter.

Here's an example of a starter programme:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	Walk 10min		Cycle 10min		Walk 10min	

Are there any risks to exercising with Diabetes?

Yes, but not enough to prevent you from exercising and nothing the correct management of your blood sugar would stop.

When you exercise you burn energy. Your body gets this energy from sugar in your blood and storage in your muscles. If the energy required for the exercise is greater than your blood sugar levels you may experience a “hypo” or a sudden and excessive drop in your sugar.

If you are experiencing a “hypo” you usually feel the following symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Feeling faint
- Confusion
- Cold sweats
- Clammy hands
- Feeling weak

What precautions should I take?

- Make sure there is someone around you who knows you are a diabetic or wear a medic-alert bracelet when exercising.
- Make sure you eat at least 2 hours before exercise and within 1 hour of exercising.
- Make sure you have a high sugar snack or glucose tablet close to you that will be quickly absorbed in case of becoming “hypo”.
- If your blood sugar is below 5.5 make sure you have a high sugar snack or glucose tablet before exercising.
- Do not exercise if your blood sugar is higher than 13.9 or your urinary ketones test positive.
- Avoid insulin injections within an hour of exercise i.e. plan your exercise time so that it doesn't correspond with your injection time.
- Make sure you have good foot wear and socks to avoid blistering or rubbing.
- Make sure you remain hydrated during and after exercise.

Have you recently been diagnosed with Diabetes, are overweight and haven't exercised in years but are not sure where to start?

Biokineticist can help you! They are trained to prescribe exercise to people who have specific exercise needs, like Diabetics.

Biokineticists can help you get started with your exercise programme by leading you through which exercises you should be doing while making sure your blood sugar is stable during and after exercise.

Yours in health,
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