



steps to better glucose control

Are you overloaded with advice about managing diabetes?

Dr Adam Fraser and Christine Amarego distill the messages to fit on one hand.

Were you overwhelmed when you were first diagnosed with diabetes? Do you still feel confused by it all? One minute you are fine, the next you have a chronic disease and need a specialist for this and that, have to change what you eat and monitor your glucose levels. For many people, this can be too much.

Many of our clients talk about 'diabetes fatigue', where they have continual thoughts about their diabetes. They fear what might happen if they don't follow every piece of advice and get confused between fact and fiction. On top of emotional fallout from their diabetes diagnosis, it leaves them exhausted and swamped.

For many people, a diabetes diagnosis is like being told there is something wrong with them. However with diabetes, your metabolic processes are just out of whack and there's actually a lot you can do to bring them back into line.

Here are our top five tips to simplify your diabetes management plan:

1. Stand up

Have you got 'sitting disease'? Advances in technology and changes in society mean we move less and sit more but studies are starting to link poor health with sitting too long. A University of Queensland study has only just found that "Even when adults meet physical activity guidelines, sitting for prolonged periods can compromise metabolic health."

Ensure you spend no more than one hour at a time sitting — get up and move around, even if it's only for a few minutes. And go for a walk during lunch rather than eating at the office — around one in three Australian workers eat lunch at their desk! Give yourself a mental break, as well as a physical one!

2. Exercise

Improving your fitness not only helps keep your diabetes in check but also prevents and manages several other conditions, including osteoporosis, heart disease and some cancers. Exercise training improves your insulin sensitivity (i.e. how your cells respond to insulin), which reduces the amount of insulin your pancreas has to produce to cope with each load of glucose from your food. This is important, because high insulin levels send signals for your body to store instead of using fat for energy. By reducing your insulin levels, you can thus even help reduce your weight. If you're new to exercise, aim to get just 20 minutes per day. If you're already exercising, think about extending the length of your sessions or trying new activities.

3. Fill your tank with the right stuff

When it comes to carbohydrates such as bread and pasta, choose the brown and grainy options. They tend to have a lower Glycaemic Index (GI), which means a slow and sustained release of glucose once you've eaten it, making it easier for your pancreas to cope. Low-GI carbs help keep your blood glucose levels in range without spikes and dips; they also tend to be higher in fibre than their white counterparts.

All the above help you feel fuller for longer. What about rice? Choose Doongara or basmati for lower GI.

It's not just a slogan; it's an easy way of remembering how much fruit and vegies you need each day. Two serves of fruit and five serves of vegies a day help

Go for 2 and 5

prevent a range of conditions, including heart disease, some cancers, overweight/obesity and constipation. For someone with diabetes, they can also improve glucose control and reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Vegies tend to be extremely low GI and some (like broccoli, cauliflower, mushrooms and rocket) are so low in carbohydrate that they don't even have a GI! Even sweet corn is rated at 48 when anything 55 and below is considered 'low GI'. Vegetables are full of nutrients and because they're low GI, they'll keep your glucose levels in check and help you to feel fuller for longer too!

Choose vegetable not animal fats

Not all fats are created equal! Plant fats tend to be mono- or polyunsaturated — the good kind. They are better for your heart and blood vessels, which is really important for someone with diabetes, where the risk of developing heart disease is greater. These fats are found in olive oil, nuts, seeds and avocados.

Animal fats tend to be high in saturated fats — the not-so-good kind — that raise levels of LDL cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol), contributing to narrowing of your arteries which, in turn, can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. Go easy on fatty meats, such as bacon, sausages and salami, and remove all visible skin and fat from meats prior to cooking. The only exception is fish: oily fish are full of healthy fats that improve our health [see page 16].

4. Chill out

When your body is under stress, it prepares itself for attack with the 'fight or flight' stress response. Stress can be physical (e.g. injury or illness) or mental (work or financial worries). This means energy stores are mobilised so there's more glucose and fat circulating in your system. In someone with diabetes, this extra energy may not be able to get into the cells because there's not enough insulin to carry it, or the insulin is not working efficiently. On top of this, unless you really need to physically respond (e.g. run away from a wild dog), there's probably more glucose in your system than your body actually needs, particularly if it's from mental stress.

How to control our stress levels? You may not be able to remove the stress itself (you can't change jobs every time you get a big project and you can't make broken bones heal any faster than they want!) but you can take other steps:

- change what you can. If peak-hour traffic drives you insane, get to and leave work early to avoid it
- distract yourself. Starting an exercise program or joining a club/team will not only directly reduce your elevated blood sugar levels, it may also switch your mind to something else

- relax! Practise just breathing, listening to a relaxation or meditation tape or, again, exercise! These activities may help reduce your body's sensitivity to stress hormones, which helps physiologically.

5. Talk to the experts


Maintaining a good relationship with your GP is important because you rely on them for a lot of information and advice. Make sure that you and your GP are on the same page with your diabetes management plan.

If you're not entirely happy with your doctor, you may want to ask friends and family to recommend a GP with whom you could establish an ongoing and comfortable relationship. Your GP will most likely ensure that you have a blood test at least quarterly to monitor your HbA_{1c} (to get a good idea of your blood glucose control over the past three months, even if your day-to-day glucose levels have fluctuated). They will also be likely to keep tabs on other indicators of health to keep your risk of complications at bay.

If your diabetes needs a bit more time than your GP has, endocrinologists specialise in managing diabetes and can help you and your doctor. Lastly, your local pharmacist can be an excellent source of information on your medications.

While it is common to feel daunted by all of this, keep your management plan simple with clarity and consistency. You have the power to direct your diabetes management plan and who is part of your management team.

Do you have a question? Send in your question to brooke@healthpublishingust.com.au and if it is published you will receive a copy of *Sugar Daddy*.




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