



In Sickness and in Health: *Helping a Loved One Manage Diabetes*

Meal planning, daily physical activity, blood-sugar monitoring and medications. The day-in and day-out requirements of diabetes management can overwhelm those with this chronic disease.

“That’s where loving family members can help,” says Eve Gehling, R.D., a certified diabetes educator and author of *The Family and Friends Guide to Diabetes*. “The best way to help someone with diabetes is to first learn what diabetes is and how it’s treated.”

Doing so will help you support your loved one’s efforts to manage his or her blood-glucose levels, care for your family member when he or she is ill, and prepare healthful meals he or she will enjoy.

Steps to take

Offer to go to doctors’ appointments together or attend a diabetes education program. “Check with your local health care providers or the local chapter of the American Diabetes Association to find out which diabetes conferences or workshops will be in your town,” says Ms. Gehling. “Offer to attend with him or her, or provide a ride or baby-sitting so your loved one can attend.”

Be active together. Go walking, go dancing or rake the lawn together. Not only does being physically active help diabetes management, it also reduces stress and increases energy levels.

Help with food shopping and meal planning, especially if your family member should lose weight. The diabetes diet

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is one of the healthiest, promoting heart health and weight control. The entire family can benefit from following it. If you don't want to follow the entire diet, try not to eat foods high in sugar and fats, and opt for whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

Be aware of how you think about and use food. "Many people are brought up to express their love for others through food," says Ms. Gehling. "Try to show your affection in ways other than baking or buying sweets."

Encourage your loved one to use a meter to check blood-sugar (glucose) levels. Blood-sugar monitoring often is the most stressful aspect of diabetes management.

"Every blood-glucose test gives useful information," says Ms. Gehling. "It provides the person with a better understanding of the changes that can be caused by hormones, illness, exercise, stress or diet."

Frequent blood testing also helps people with diabetes learn how to fine-tune their diabetes control.

Ms. Gehling suggests family members not focus solely on the numbers; instead, she says they should congratulate their loved one for checking his or her blood-sugar levels regularly and encourage him or her to continue doing so.

Family members should learn the signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and hyperglycemia (high blood sugar). They should learn how to help the loved one manage diabetes if he or she gets the flu or other illness.

Ms. Gehling also recommends that family members provide support by giving positive reinforcement rather than pointing out negatives or nagging.

"The amount of support available from family and friends is an important predictor of successful diabetes management," she says. "The type of support needed will differ from person to person, so rather than assuming what's best for your loved one, simply ask how you can help. And after you ask, the most important thing to do is listen to the answer."

Tests

If you have diabetes, be sure to ask your doctor about these important tests:

- HbA1c
- blood pressure
- cholesterol
- dilated eye exam
- urine test for protein

The screenshot shows the CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield Diabetes Management website. The header includes the logo and navigation links like 'About Us', 'Contact Us', 'Glossary', and 'Media Center'. Below the logo is a 'My Care First' section with links for 'Members & Visitors', 'Employers & Benefit Managers', 'Providers & Physicians', and 'Brokers & Agents'. A search bar is present with the text 'SEARCH MY CARE FIRST' and 'Advanced Search'. The main content area is titled 'DIABETES MANAGEMENT' and features a large featured article 'How to CHECK YOUR BLOOD SUGAR' with a sub-headline 'A WORKABLE GUIDE TO MANAGING TYPE 2 DIABETES'. Below this are several resource cards: 'Understanding Diabetes' (When you have diabetes, your body has trouble using the energy from the food you eat), 'For the Newly Diagnosed' (You may feel overwhelmed to know you have diabetes, but remember - it's a condition that can be successfully managed), 'Long-Term Complications' (High blood sugar levels eventually can cause serious health problems... Keeping your blood sugar under control can help prevent or delay complications), 'Taking Control' (By working with your health care team, you can take charge of your condition. Healthy lifestyle changes can make a big difference.), 'Type 2 Diabetes in Children' (With obesity on the increase in children, type 2 diabetes and other health problems in youngsters are...), and 'Diabetes During Pregnancy' (Sometimes changes in your body when you're pregnant cause your blood sugar to rise. This is called...).

Resources

- To help you manage diabetes, visit our Online Diabetes Center at www.carefirst.com/diabetes for educational articles and interactive calculators, quizzes and trackers. If you don't have diabetes, find out if you're at risk by taking the diabetes risk assessment.
- Our Diabetes Management Program offers eligible members access to nurses, who will work with you and your doctor to support your treatment plan, set goals and track your progress. You will also receive a new member kit and quarterly bulletins that are filled with tips to help you manage your condition. To find out if you are eligible, call **800-783-4582**. Members whose primary insurance is Medicare are not eligible for this program and should call Medicare at **800-MEDICARE** or visit its Web site at www.medicare.gov/Health/Diabetes.asp.