

What You Should Know About... Lifestyle Changes

Lifestyle changes, including healthy food choices and increased physical activity, are an important part of any diabetes management plan. Read on to learn about lifestyle changes you can make that may not only help to improve your diabetes but may also help you to feel better overall!

One of the most important steps that you can take toward controlling your diabetes is to make lifestyle changes. First, be sure to *talk with your healthcare provider* about the types of lifestyle changes that are appropriate for you. After this discussion, your healthcare provider will partner with you to create an individualized diabetes management plan. This plan will consider your personal needs and preferences and any other medical conditions that you may have, and will be designed to help you achieve the treatment goals that you and your healthcare provider agree upon.

Below is information on some of the lifestyle changes that your healthcare provider may recommend.

Making healthier food choices

In general, foods that are high in fiber (such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans), low-fat dairy products (such as fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt), and fresh fish are all healthy food choices. Making some changes in your portion and serving sizes, and the types of food that you eat, can help you to eat a healthier diet overall. Here are some tips:

- ▶ Watch your serving and portion sizes: *serving size* is the recommended amount of food that you are supposed to eat for a meal or snack. *Portion size* is how much you actually eat. Remember that even if foods are healthy, eating larger portions increases the amount of calories that you are consuming and can cause you to gain weight. See "Measuring Portion and Serving Sizes" at right to learn more.
- ▶ Be mindful of your fat intake: avoid saturated and "trans" fats, which are high in calories and can also increase your risk for heart disease
- ▶ Eat more whole grains, such as brown rice or whole-wheat bread or pasta
- ▶ Choose lean cuts of meat, such as pork loin or sirloin, and remove the skin from chicken or turkey
- ▶ Limit the amount of sweet desserts and snacks that you eat: replace snacks that are higher in calories and fat, such as chips or cookies, with healthier snacks, such as fruit or low-fat yogurt
- ▶ Reduce the amount of fruit juice and sweetened beverages that you drink, and switch to calorie-free drinks or water: this can help to lower the amount of empty calories that you take in during the day

Increasing physical activity

Aim for at least 2 ½ hours (150 minutes) of moderate physical activity per week. This could include aerobic exercise (such as walking or riding a bike) and muscle-strengthening exercise (such as lifting light weights). Think about the types of activities that will fit into your lifestyle—and ideally, that you will enjoy doing! This might mean joining a gym, taking an exercise class with a friend, or walking your dog an extra block or two. Even small increases in physical activity are good—just be sure to discuss your plans with your healthcare provider before getting started.

Losing weight

If you are overweight, your healthcare provider will work with you to come up with a target goal for weight loss and a plan for you to lose weight safely. Healthy eating and increasing physical activity are two great ways to get on the road to losing weight.

Other behavior changes that may be helpful

Your healthcare provider may also talk with you about some general changes that you can make to help you lead a healthier lifestyle. These might include stopping smoking and limiting your intake of alcohol, such as beer or wine.

Even if you are making lifestyle changes, you may still need to take medication to manage your diabetes. Your healthcare provider will work with you to develop an appropriate medication plan. You should be involved in any decisions related to your diabetes treatment—if you have questions, or are unsure about any of the recommendations that your healthcare provider is making, ask!

The bottom line

Lifestyle changes are an important part of managing your diabetes. Talk with your healthcare provider to discuss the changes that are appropriate for you.

MEASURING PORTION AND SERVING SIZES

Below are some general guidelines for measuring portion and serving sizes. It may also be helpful for you to use a measuring cup or food scale until you become familiar with the correct portion and serving sizes for different types of food.

- ▶ One serving of meat or poultry (such as chicken or turkey) = a deck of cards
- ▶ One serving of fish (3 ounces) = a checkbook
- ▶ One serving of cheese = six dice
- ▶ 1/2 cup of cooked rice or pasta = a tennis ball
- ▶ 1 cup of chopped raw fruit or vegetables = a baseball
- ▶ One medium baked potato = a computer mouse
- ▶ 1/2 cup of ice cream or snacks, such as chips or pretzels = a tennis ball
- ▶ 1/4 cup of dried fruit or nuts = a golf ball

REFERENCES American Diabetes Association (ADA). Be active, but how? Available at: <http://www.diabetes.org/food-and-fitness/fitness/fitness-management/be-active-but-how.html>; ADA. Making healthy food choices. Available at: <http://www.diabetes.org/food-and-fitness/food/what-can-i-eat/making-healthy-food-choices.html>; ADA. *Diabetes Care*. 2012;35(suppl 1):S11-S63.; Inzucchi SE, et al. *Diabetes Care*. 2012;35(6):1364-1379.; MedlinePlus. Portion size. Available at: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000337.htm>. All websites accessed October 18, 2012.



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