

# Patient information

## Diabetes: Lifestyle and Exercise

### Benefits of exercise in diabetes

Exercise may help control your weight and reduce blood sugar. It also reduces your risk of heart attacks and may help control blood pressure. Exercise can also reduce stress and improve your overall self-esteem as well as your health. However, though exercise is a good way of reducing your risk of complications, people respond in different ways to exercise. It is therefore not possible to make a general recommendation on a suitable programme of exercise.

### How much exercise and what type?

It is important to take in to account your type of diabetes and take some precautions when planning your programme of exercise. These are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

It is considered that 15-30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day is adequate. Aerobic exercise helps you breathe deep and benefits the heart. Examples of aerobic exercise include swimming, walking, jogging, cycling and dancing. Discuss the various types of exercise with your doctor and seek advice on any special precautions. For example if you have problems with the nerves of your feet your doctor may ask you to choose a form of exercise which does not place any stress on your feet.

When you start an exercise programme, go slowly then gradually increase the intensity and length of your sessions. Talk to your doctor for specific advice.

### What precautions should I take?

#### Type 1 diabetes

- Test your blood sugar before exercising.
- If your levels are less than 5.5 mmol/l - have a snack before exercising.
- If your sugar levels are between 5.5 to 8.5 mmol/l - have a snack handy to take during exercise.

- If you plan on taking vigorous exercise and you feel you are likely to have a hypo consider the option of cutting your dose of insulin by a few units. Discuss this with your doctor or diabetes nurse.

## **Type 2 diabetes**

- Carry some glucose tablets or a sweet drink to use in an emergency
- Examine your feet before and after exercise - look for signs of redness or blistering
- Drink plenty of fluid before, during and after exercise. When exercising, your body loses more fluid to keep you cool. By the time you feel thirsty, you may already be getting dehydrated. Dehydration (not enough fluid in your body) can affect your blood sugar level.
- Look out for symptoms of hypoglycaemia. The usual symptoms of increase in heart rate and sweating may also occur due to exercise and should not be ignored. If in doubt check your blood sugar.
- No matter what kind of exercise you do, you should warm up before you start and cool down when you're done. To warm up, spend 5 to 10 minutes doing a low-intensity exercise such as walking, then gently stretch for another 5 to 10 minutes. Repeat these steps after exercising to cool down.
- As a general rule avoid exercising if your blood sugar is too low or too high

## **What are the risks of exercise?**

- The main risk associated with exercise is hypoglycaemia. Exercise changes the way the body reacts to insulin and with regular exercise you may develop hypoglycaemia after exercise.
- If you have circulatory problems or neuropathy your feet may develop blisters or ulcers
- Consult your doctor if you have ischaemic heart disease

## **Checklist for exercise**

- Talk to your doctor about the right exercise for you.
- Check your blood sugar level before and after exercising.
- Check your feet for blisters or sores before and after exercising.
- Wear the proper shoes and socks.
- Drink plenty of fluid before, during and after exercising.
- Warm up before exercising and cool down afterward.
- Have a snack handy in case your blood sugar level drops.

For further information go to: [www.diabetesuffolk.com](http://www.diabetesuffolk.com)

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