

UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS

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Exercise is one of the best things we can do for ourselves. This is especially true for people with diabetes.

You may already be making healthy food choices and possibly taking medication. And when you add regular exercise, you can make all your efforts to manage your blood glucose even more effective.

Over time, regular exercise can help bring your blood glucose level down; help you lose weight and improve muscle tone; make your heart stronger and reduce the risk of heart disease; reduce stress, and give you a sense of well-being and accomplishment.

It is important that exercise be an ongoing part of your lifestyle, not something you do now and then.

While all forms of exercise are helpful, it is aerobic exercise that's most useful in managing your diabetes. This is any form of activity that brings up your heart rate and keeps it up for at least twenty minutes at a time – like walking, biking, or swimming.

Not only will aerobic exercise help you achieve your target blood glucose goals, it also helps you lose weight by burning calories.

Let's take a look at calories. All foods contain them.

It's a pretty simple formula – the body burns calories for energy. The more you eat, the more calories you take in. The more active you are, the more calories you burn. If you take in more calories than you burn, you gain weight. If you burn more calories than you take in, you will lose weight.

As your weight and blood glucose level come down, you may be able to reduce the amount of diabetes medication you take, or even eliminate it altogether.

“When I was first diagnosed with diabetes, it was eleven years ago. It was insulin three times a day, finger sticks five and six times a day. And like I say, from the exercise and diet, the weight came off and I'm down to taking insulin once a day.”

Exercise and moderate weight loss are also good for your heart. This is especially important because people with diabetes have an increased risk of heart disease.

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Exercise helps make your heart muscle grow stronger. It can reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke, and may improve cholesterol levels and blood pressure.

"I went to the doctor just two or three months after I started walking. He said, 'What are you doing? Your blood pressure has dropped thirty points.' And the last time I was to see him he was on the border of recommending some medication to control it."

Besides aerobic activity, include weight bearing, or resistance exercises for added health benefits. These help increase muscle mass and fight osteoporosis, a disease that weakens your bones. Aside from weight lifting, examples include walking, jogging, and playing tennis.

And all types of exercise have another benefit – an increased sense of well-being.

"I can exercise and I can see how my blood sugar drops and it's positive reinforcement. I'm not worried about my weight. I feel better. I think I look better. You have more energy. It's wonderful."

"I enjoy the feeling that I get, especially after I exercise. I've had a good workout, I feel better for it. Then I'll check my sugar and I get a good reading, and that's a double pay off."

"Mainly, it's a fun thing to do. And it's not just for health reasons. It's just out of enjoyment. It makes me feel a whole lot better."

"Exercise, believe it or not, gives you more energy. My days are better, I get more done. I feel better about myself. I've done something positive for me, to help me. The exercise just makes all the difference in the world."