

Physical activity and diabetes

Regular physical activity is good for you for many reasons. It can help you to lower blood glucose levels, lower stress, lose weight, lower blood pressure and blood fats and is good for your heart.

What kinds of activities are good for me?

- Activities that get your large muscles moving are the best. Aerobic activities such as walking, bike riding, swimming, dancing, sports and active games are especially good.
- Activities that make your muscles work against a weight (lifting weights or other objects) or against gravity (using bodyweight) are also important and good for you. Resistance activities such as lifting cans of food, squats and wall push ups are great examples.
- Most importantly, think of things you like to do to make physical activity more enjoyable. Grab a friend and have a yarn and a walk, play with the kids or walk the dog.

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What should I be aiming for?

- Aerobic activities such as those listed above:
 - Aim to do at least 30 minutes every day. this should be on top of your normal day to day activities.
 - You can divide this into smaller bouts of activity, for example three 10-minute sessions or two 15-minute sessions.
 - You should be puffing a little bit and may be a bit sweaty, but you should still be able to talk pretty normally.
 - If you want to lose weight, doing activity for longer than 30 minutes in a day is better.

- Try to also do some resistance/strength exercises:
 - Aim for at least 2–3 times per week.
 - Choose 8–10 different exercises that use your large muscles (legs, tummy, back, chest and arms).
 - Use your bodyweight or choose a weight you can lift 8–10 times for each exercise.
 - Then repeat this 2–3 times for each exercise, making sure to rest one minute between each turn.



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- It is important to remember that if you are not already active, you can work up to these levels gradually. For example, start with 2–3 days of activity and then add an extra day in each week until you reach the recommended levels.

Where do things like mowing the lawn, vacuuming the house and gardening fit?

These things are known as “incidental activities”, which means the active things you do as part of everyday life.

- Increasing your time spent on daily activities, can help to improve your overall level of physical activity, but doesn't replace the need to carry out the aerobic and resistance activities that were described above.
- Some examples of how to increase your incidental activity are:
 - Parking the car further away or getting off the train a stop early so that you increase the amount of walking you do
 - Taking the stairs instead of the lift or escalators

Do I need to worry about my diabetes when exercising?

- People with diabetes can have heart problems. Check with your doctor before doing something new.
- If you are taking diabetes tablets or insulin, carry jelly beans or a sweet drink with you during activity in case you have a hypo.
- If you have a blood glucose meter, it is a good idea to check your blood glucose (sugar) level before and after activity to see the effect it has on your body.
- Sometimes you might need something to eat before activity. Good choices are fruit or a piece of wholegrain bread.
- Wear proper fitting, closed in shoes for your activities.
- Check your feet after your workout, looking for redness, blisters or other signs of wear and tear. If your feet sweat, change your socks.
- Drink plenty of water.

Are there times when I shouldn't exercise?

- If you are sick or unwell, it is a good idea to rest and wait until you are feeling better before doing any physical activity.
- If you have medical conditions other than your diabetes make sure to check with your doctor before beginning physical activity and get the ok from them.
- If you're not sure how to perform an activity safely, seek advice from a professional before you have a go at it.
- You might feel tired and not want to go for a walk, but often a walk is just what you need. Being tired is an excuse, not a reason!
- If it is very hot, go out during a cooler part of the day.



“Hands on Country”

This painting was created for Australian Diabetes Council by artist Chris Tobin, a Dharug man, and a traditional custodian in the Blue Mountains region. In the artist's words: “The central part of this painting represents the relationship of the clan – it's a unity of people looking out for each other while living independent lives.”

Need more information?
Call our customer care line on

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