



Finding the Exercise Plan That Works Best With Your Diabetes

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Say Yes to Dopamine

If someone offered us a readily available medicine that resulted in happier moods, better memory, decreased anxiety and improved motor performance, most of us would say, "I'll take it!"

You may be disappointed to find out that this free and accessible medicine is exercise, but it's true that regularly moving your body can improve both your physical and mental health. For people with diabetes, exercise is the cheapest way to manage your blood sugar and potentially reduce your need for medication.

What Type of Exercise?

There are different forms of exercise that fulfill different needs. If you're like most people, there will be a type that you're most partial to, but it's important to try to find a combination of aerobic (gets the heart pumping); anaerobic (more intense activity, but of shorter duration—think working out with weights or jumping rope); and flexibility and balance exercises (like yoga), which are especially important as you age.

Aerobic Exercise

For a person with diabetes, exercise that raises your heart rate for a minimum of 30 minutes five days a week is truly the gold standard. Participating in regular physical exercise of this type can improve blood glucose levels and can sometimes reverse the need for medication for people with type 2 diabetes. It can also help you lower your weight and decrease your blood pressure.

WALKING. You can walk by yourself, at the spur of the moment, or get together to walk with friends. You can walk almost anywhere, from a sidewalk to a mountain trail. Just

try to walk briskly enough to raise your heart rate for at least part of the time.

RUNNING. Jogging regularly can have truly wonderful effects on your body. If you are not an experienced runner, start slow, don't compare yourself to others and keep track of your progress. It's fun to see that daily half mile turn into a daily two miles and, who knows, maybe there's a 5k race for charity in your future.

SWIMMING. A 2020 study found that swimming may be the best exercise for people with type 2 diabetes, since it improves overall strength and vascular function. Swimming laps also provides great aerobic benefits without the stress on your joints that running can cause. The same goes for water aerobics classes, aqua jogging and the like.

TEAM SPORTS. If you're having a hard time getting motivated on your own, why not try a team sport? Tennis and pickleball are usually available at local rec centers. Fitness classes like Zumba also count and can be a nice way to meet people.

Anaerobic Exercise

Weightlifting and resistance training have been shown to help manage your blood glucose levels and enable your body to use insulin more efficiently. You'll also be able decrease fat while increasing muscle. However, anaerobic exercise is not an everyday activity—try it two or three times a week, lest muscle tears or ligament strains get in the way of your training.

WEIGHTLIFTING. A 2023 study showed that people who did strength-training alone showed more improvement in blood sugar levels than those who did cardio alone, probably because they got rid of more fat, especially belly fat. Remember that the point of weightlifting is not to build outsized muscles but improve your strength and fitness. As with any exercise, start activity gradually with lighter hand weights or on weight machines, and then increase as you get stronger.

RESISTANCE TRAINING. Whether you're using an elastic band, doing exercises that use your own body as resistance (push-ups, pull-ups and the like), or lifting medicine balls or weighted bags, you're improving bone density and muscle mass.

Exercise Tips

Before starting any new exercise routine, remember:

Check in with your medical team to make sure your doctor approves of your workouts.

Always **monitor your blood glucose** before you begin exercising. If it's slightly higher than normal, be sure to monitor it at least once during exercise. If it is abnormally high, check with your doctor before exercising.

Exercise that gets your heart rate up can cause a drop in your blood glucose, which is normal, and, in fact,

BALANCE EXERCISES. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends that adults with diabetes who are fifty years or older do balance exercises, especially if they have peripheral neuropathy due to their diabetes. Most of these can be done by standing near a chair (for support) and raising yourself on one leg, walking heel to toe (as if you are taking a sobriety test) or taking Tai Chi or yoga classes. Not only will this help prevent falls as you age, but it will also help you keep your balance as you do other exercises.



the desired effect. But always **keep fast-acting carb snacks nearby** in case your blood sugar drops too much.

Your blood glucose may rise for an hour or so after really intense levels of exercise. This is a **normal and temporary** effect due to the stress on your muscles. However, if you want to avoid this spike, stick to moderate-intensity workouts.

Sources: <https://www.eatingwell.com/article/8056119/best-way-to-exercise-if-you-have-diabetes-research/> | <https://www.healthline.com/health/type-2-diabetes/top-exercises#swimming> | https://journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/fulltext/2020/02000/the_effects_of_water_based_exercise_training_in17.aspx | <https://www.qwhospital.com/about/blog/best-time-exercise-if-you-have-diabetes> | <https://diabetes.org/health-wellness/fitness/anaerobic-exercise-diabetes> | <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2992225/> | <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10527535/> | <https://med.nyu.edu/departments-institutes/neuroscience/research/journal-club/journal-club-2022-articles/exercise-boosts-dopamine-release-this-requires-bdnf> | <https://diabetes.org/health-wellness/fitness/balance-and-avoiding-falls>.

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