



## How Your Partner Fits into Your Diabetes Management

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### For better or for worse...

When a person develops type 2 diabetes, they have a **host of new information to process**: how to monitor blood sugar, administer insulin, plan meals, schedule medical appointments and the like. And those are just the practical matters; individuals newly diagnosed with diabetes can be prone to depression and anxiety at this unexpected development in their lives. Moreover, diabetes suddenly becomes a big part of their spouses' or partners' lives—and **relationships can become complicated**.



### A source of help or increased tension? It depends.

Millions of people with diabetes live happy, productive lives, but there probably isn't one of them who would say that managing the disease is easy. And, if you are in a committed relationship, your condition means potentially large lifestyle changes that your loved one likely hadn't bargained for.

Researchers have found that **people in committed relationships who have diabetes tend to cope better and have lower A1C values** because they don't feel that they have to manage their illness on their own. Partners can motivate, help prepare healthy meals or take part in exercise. One recent study in BMJ Open Diabetes Research & Care showed that when older adults lost their spouse or partner, their **blood sugar went up**, although **results improved** if they found a new companion.

However, there are certain challenges that the partners of people with diabetes often face, including:

#### MANAGING LIFE CHANGES

Diabetes may cause couples to face concerns about **sexual performance and fertility, weight gain, changes** in valued routines and **added expenses**. The person with diabetes may feel like a burden, while the one without the illness may feel that they didn't sign up for this. They may also feel ignored or sidelined, especially at first, as their partner concentrates on the more immediate pressures of treatment.

#### CAREGIVER STRESS

In 2021, researchers published the **results of an 18-year study** in Diabetes Care in which they found that an individual who cares for their partner with diabetes has a **24% higher risk of depression or anxiety**. The **risk rises to 89% higher** if the partner's diabetes significantly limits normal daily activities.

## SYMPATHETIC DIABETES

Another research study of spouses of people with type 2 diabetes in Diabetes Care found that they have a **"significantly increased" risk of developing type 2 diabetes themselves**. This may be because of shared environmental factors during the marriage or it may be due to a phenomenon known as **"associative mating,"** where people tend to marry people of similar appearance—in this case, possibly, a similarly high BMI. With this in mind, it may be advisable for partners of people with diabetes to **get regular screenings for the disease**.

## Patience is important



Remember that **you and your partner's** routines together will be undergoing changes, which many people find stressful. It is not the end of the world, but everyone needs to **be kind and patient**. The end result can actually be a **stronger and more loving** relationship.

## Education is Key

When speaking to your partner after your diabetes diagnosis, it pays to be honest and direct—and, if necessary, to reach out for outside help. **Here are some ways you can approach the topic:**

### EXPLAIN WHAT DIABETES MEANS

If you have diabetes and are in a committed relationship, one of the most important things you can do is educate your partner about what having the disease entails. There are any number of online programs available from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Diabetes Association (ADA) and elsewhere that can provide your partner with a solid overview.

### ASK YOUR PARTNER TO ACCOMPANY YOU TO MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

Having a trusted partner at your doctor's appointments provides you with a back-up note-taker in case you miss something during the visit. The doctor can also explain to your partner the symptoms of high and low blood sugar levels, how to administer insulin, the importance of a healthy diet and exercise and other helpful guidelines.

### YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN HEALTH

While a committed partner can be incredibly valuable when it comes to helping you with your diabetes, explain to them that you take responsibility for your own health—then provide them with ways in which they can support you. Nagging if you consume a few carbs too many at dinner? Probably not helpful. But assistance with scheduling doctor's appointments or a willingness to help cook new meals for your improved diet might be quite welcome.

### YOUR PARTNER CAN HELP— BUT UNDERSTAND THEIR LIMITS

Ask yourself—if my partner had diabetes, would I be willing to help in their care? The answer is almost certainly yes. So don't assume you are a burden to your partner. But do find out what their limits are. They may be squeamish about certain medical issues but not others. Certain times of the day will work for them, while others do not. And, if their talents naturally lie in a certain direction—they may be a great cook, researcher or fitness buff—then try to lean on them for those areas of support.

Sources: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8247506/> | <https://diatribe.org/mental-health/you-me-and-diabetes-how-condition-impacts-relationships> | <https://diabetesjournals.org/care/article/26/3/710/29172/Are-Spouses-of-Patients-With-Type-2-Diabetes-at-Risk> | <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/type-2-diabetes-having-a-partner-may-help-lower-your-risk> | <https://www.diabetes.co.uk/supporting-a-diabetic-partner.html> | <https://www.cancermsu.edu/news/married-with-diabetes> | <https://sph.emory.edu/news/news-release/2021/05/household-diabetes-study.html#:~:text=Researchers%20from%20Rollins%20School%20of%20depression%20and%20For%20anxiety>

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