

# Navigating diabetes as a parent

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## Parenting with diabetes

Being a parent is a life-changing experience, and it comes with a great deal of responsibility. If you also have diabetes, that goes double. You have to manage all of your usual parenting responsibilities while dealing with the challenges of monitoring your health and making sure you are available to your family.

That can be a lot to handle, but there are ways to lighten your load. As you're working together with your doctor to manage your diabetes, you can share some of your experiences and the steps you're taking to stay healthy with your family.

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## How to talk about diabetes with your family

Even at a young age, children are curious and often worry about their parents. Here are a few approaches that may put their minds at rest and help them understand how to support you.

### Give an age-appropriate explanation.

[Tell your children what diabetes is](#) and how the medication you take and the diet you may be on will help you lead a normal life. [Be honest](#). You will have moments when you may not be feeling well, but assure them that you will be there for them when they need you.

### Let your children know that they can ask questions.

As they get older, your children will assuredly do so anyway. Children often wonder, "Will I get diabetes, too?" For parents with diabetes, this is a tough one, because the answer is "maybe" and depends on several different factors. If this question comes up a great deal, it may help to consult your doctor on how to deal with it or find other parents in online support groups who can help with suggestions.

### Make a hard and fast rule not to touch your diabetes supplies.

This includes needles and syringes (which should be locked away or put well out of reach), glucose meter, test strips and insulin pump, glucose tablets and gummies. An exception to this would be for older children, whom you can teach to help you when needed. For example, they could bring you your gummies if you're hitting a low or even call a loved one or 911 in an emergency.



## Modeling a healthy lifestyle for your children

One facet of your life with diabetes that you can share with your children is your diet and exercise routine. Studies have shown that when parents with diabetes appear to have a hard time keeping up with proper nutrition, it can affect a child's view of the disease and of healthier diet approaches in general. Making food choices that are healthy for your diabetes and for your family can help everyone.

**Start including your child at a young age.** Showing a toddler why you choose carrot sticks over potato chips, why whole grains are healthier choices, or why fruit is so important are lessons that can stick with them for life.

**Make it fun.** Ask your child to provide different colors for a salad from vegetables on a tray. Use blueberries to create faces in their bowls of oatmeal. Find simple and healthy baking recipes that they can take part in. This fosters a sense of responsibility and gives growing kids the knowledge of how to make healthy choices.

**A time to teach.** Without sounding too didactic, you can impart a lot of information during meal preparation, especially to older children. Which foods affect your glucose levels, why you are counting carbs (many children don't know the relationship between a bagel and blood sugar) and why your portions are arranged a certain way on your plate.

**Exercising with your kids.** This is a little difficult, mostly because you probably aren't going to want to go running with your children. But you can model your own behavior for them, as well as encourage play-related exercise at home or sports and activities at school.

**Your kids are not you.** For parents with diabetes, it's important to understand that you're probably not going to be able to get your pre-teen to completely eschew pizza and Sour Patch Kids. All you can do is steer them in the right direction.

## The emotional component

If you're a parent, diabetes can bring up a lot of conflicting feelings. Parents might feel guilty because their disease may take time away from their children, that they could pass on their diabetes to their kids or even that they may be causing their kids worry or distress. However, diabetes is not your fault, and children can actually be quite resilient if you are open about it. But if feelings of [depression and self-blame continue](#), it may be helpful to open up to a spouse, partner or friend about the way you are feeling or seek a support group or a professional counselor with some experience in this area.



## A crucial development

In 1982 the first biosynthetic human insulin – Humulin – that is identical in chemical structure to human insulin and can be mass produced was [approved for the public](#). Why is that important? Since the 1920s, insulin was produced from the pancreases of animals, usually cows or pigs. According to the Food and Drug Administration, one pound of insulin required 8,000 pounds of glands from 23,500 animals—and treated only 750 people with diabetes for one year. But with biosynthetic insulin readily available, people with diabetes were no longer plagued by supply shortages and also received insulin of greater purity and of a standard consistency.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Sources: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877575624001034#:-:text=Women%20with%20pre%20existing%20T1D,depression%20and%20anxiety%20%5B4%5D> | <https://diatribe.org/diabetes-management/being-parent-diabetes/> | <https://www.usmed.com/being-a-parent-with-diabetes/> | <https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/fda-history-exhibits/100-years-insulin#:-:text=The%20development%20of%20BHIs%20not,diverse%20needs%20of%20diabetes%20patients>

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