Diabetes and Exercise

Benefits of exercise
Some of the benefits of exercise are to:
• Improve your blood sugar control.
• Help with weight control.
• Improve your body’s ability to use its own insulin.
• Help you feel better and have more energy.
• Lessen your risk of diabetes complications.
• May help lower your lipid levels (cholesterol and triglycerides).

All of these are good reasons to begin and stick with a regular exercise program.

Your exercise plan
• Begin slowly and increase the time and intensity of your exercise over time.
• The type of exercise you choose depends on what you like and what is comfortable for you.
• You do not need to spend a lot of money on exercise equipment.
• Walking, swimming, biking, running, and jogging are all good choices.
• Check with your local recreation center or YMCA to see what exercise classes are offered if you think that you would do better with a group.
• Wear socks and shoes that fit well and are supportive to provide some cushioning for your feet.
• Dress in layers so as you warm up, you can remove a layer to keep from getting too warm.

To get the best results:
• Get 150 minutes of moderate intensity, cardiovascular exercise each week. You can break up this time into whatever increments work best for you, such as exercising for 30 minutes, 5 days a week.
• If you are new to exercising, start with 5 or 10 minutes of walking, 3 or 4 days a week. Then the second week increase to 10 minutes of walking, twice a day, 3 days a week.

Getting started
If you have not been exercising, talk with your healthcare team before you start to ensure you need no special precautions or limitations. For your safety, follow any limits your doctor sets.

Testing your blood sugar
Blood sugar testing with record keeping should be done before and after exercise, especially when you first start exercising. This will let you see the affects of exercise on your blood sugar. For some people with diabetes, especially those taking insulin, there may be a risk of hypoglycemia or low blood sugar with exercise. The amount or type of insulin may need to be adjusted or a carbohydrate snack may be used to increase blood sugar.
• Include a warm up and a cool down period with your exercise. This helps prevent injury and allows your body to adjust to your activity. It is also a good idea to stretch your muscles after you cool down. This helps with flexibility and helps to reduce injury.
• Add strength training exercises to your exercise program 2 to 3 days a week for more weight loss and improved insulin sensitivity.
• Work up to a level of exercise that is comfortable for you. If you can exercise every day, you will see better balance in your blood sugars.

Exercise at the right pace
Do not push yourself too hard. If you are walking, you should be able to say hello to your neighbor or a person passing you on the sidewalk without feeling short of breath. Exercise at a pace that makes your body work, but does not cause you pain or exhaustion.

Stop exercising right away if you feel:
• Pain or pressure in your chest, neck, or jaw
• Tired even though you have been sleeping well
• Dizzy or light-headed
• Irregular heartbeats

If any of these signs persist after stopping exercise, call your doctor or seek medical help right away.

Part of your routine
You may see some weight loss when you first begin to exercise, but then it seems to stop. Do not be discouraged. Fat takes up more space than muscle. As you exercise and build up muscle, you will become more fit. This helps your body use insulin better. You may not see many pounds come off, but you may notice that your clothes fit better and your blood sugar is better controlled.

Finding time to work exercise into your daily routine can be hard. Stick with it and you will see your effort rewarded. Choose something you feel good about doing. Find a friend who is willing to be your exercise buddy, so you can keep each other on track and motivated. The benefits of exercise are worth the effort. Your blood sugar and total body health will be better for it.