

Diabetes: how to stay safe when active

Aerobic, resistance, balance and flexibility physical activities are important for those who have diabetes.

Aerobic activities make you breathe a little harder and begin to sweat. Aim for 150 minutes of aerobic activities each week, such as brisk walking or swimming.

Resistance activities make you use your muscles to push, pull or lift. Try to do resistance activities for 2 to 3 times a week.

Balance and **flexibility activities** help to improve your range of motion and stability, reduce your risk of falls, and can prevent injury and strain.

Blood sugar awareness

Do you take insulin or insulin-releasing pills? If you do, it is important for you to be aware of your blood sugar levels when you are active.

- Check your blood sugar levels **before, during and after** physical activity.
- This will help you to prevent and treat low blood sugar levels.
- This is really important if you are trying out new physical activities or routines.

If you take insulin, it's important for you to check your blood sugar levels when physically active.



This handout for adults gives you information to help you stay safe when you are active.

Topics include:

- blood sugar awareness,
- foot care,
- medication, and
- general safety tips for physical activity.

The chart below is for those who take insulin or insulin-releasing pills. It gives you blood sugar guidelines and safety recommendations to follow when you are physically active. Avoid exercise when your blood glucose control is poor.

To do: Use this chart with your healthcare provider to discuss how to best manage your blood glucose!

**BEFORE
physical
activity**

If your blood sugar is less than 5.6 mmol/L:

- it may be too low for you to be physically active at that time.
- you may need to eat a small snack before you begin (15 grams of carbohydrates, such as a piece of fruit or a slice of bread).

**DURING
physical
activity**

- Monitor blood sugar every 30 minutes.
- Watch for signs of low blood sugar, such as dizziness, headache or feeling confused.

If blood sugar is low (less than 4.0 mmol/L):

- stop and rest,
- have a snack (15 grams of fast-absorbing carbohydrates, such as a glucose tablet or candy with sugar),
- then test your blood sugar 15 minutes later.

Continue your activity once your blood sugar returns to a safe range.

**AFTER
physical
activity**

- Check your blood sugar levels right away.
- Check 2-3 times over the next two hours.

If blood sugar is low (less than 4.0 mmol/L):

- have a snack (15 grams of fast-absorbing carbohydrates, such as a glucose tablet or candy with sugar),
- then test your blood sugar 15 minutes later.

More safety tips

- Be active 1–2 hours after you have eaten.
- Do not be active right after you have taken insulin.
- Avoid being active late in the evening, to prevent low blood sugar as you sleep.
- Carry a form of fast-acting sugar with you. For example, carry glucose tablets, or small candies with sugar in them.
- Discuss with your healthcare provider how you can prevent low blood sugar with your insulin medicine and your diet.

Foot care

Taking care of your feet is very important if you have diabetes.

Speak to your healthcare provider to find out if your feet are at risk or may give you problems when being physically active.

Are you are worried about your feet?

You may prefer to do physical activities that do not require you to be on your feet for too long.

These activities help to take some of the pressure off your feet:

- rowing,
- activities in the water, such as water aerobics, water jogging, swimming,
- cycling (indoors or outside) or arm-cycling, and
- seated exercises.

Here are more tips to keep your feet in good shape:

- Only wear shoes that fit well.
- Check your feet daily for sores or wounds. If they need to heal, delay your physical activities as needed, or try some of the activities listed above.
- Always get foot injuries examined right away.
- When active for awhile, make sure to take a break and check your feet.



Check your feet daily for sores or wounds.

Medications and your safety

Are you taking medication for your blood pressure? Check with your healthcare provider to find out.

You can still be physically active, but you will need to follow a few safety steps:

- 1) Stay cool. Your medication may make it harder for your body to cool itself when you are active. Keep your body cool by:



drinking lots of water while being active,



being active in the morning or evening when it is cooler (if the weather is hot or humid), or



decreasing the intensity (how hard you push yourself) and/or the length of time you are active when the weather or workout location is hot or humid.

- 2) Your medication may affect your blood sugar levels. This may make you feel a bit light-headed. If you feel light-headed or dizzy:



stop your activity, or slow down,



take a glucose tablet, or eat a piece of candy, and



do not resume your activity until you feel well.

General Safety Tips

Here are some general safety tips to keep in mind when you are active.

- Always warm-up and cool-down.
- Listen to your body and take breaks as needed.
- Drink water before, during and after physical activity.
- Wear your Medical Alert/ID bracelet.

Remember:

Aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility activities can help you manage and improve your diabetes. But make sure you stay safe and have fun when being physically active.

Topics in this toolkit:

- A. Taking the first step: deciding to be physically active
- B. Making a physical activity plan
- C. Setting goals for physical activity
- D. What stops you from being physically active?
- E. Benefits of physical activity
- F. Physical activity and your blood pressure
- G. High blood pressure safety
- H. Physical activity and Type 2 diabetes
- I. Diabetes safety
- J. Healthy weight and physical activity
- K. Physical activity and anxiety
- L. Anxiety safety
- M. Physical activity and chronic heart failure
- N. Chronic heart failure safety
- O. Physical activity and stroke
- P. Stroke safety
- Q. Physical activity and Parkinson's Disease
- R. Parkinson's Disease safety
- S. Physical activity and dementia
- T. Dementia safety

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