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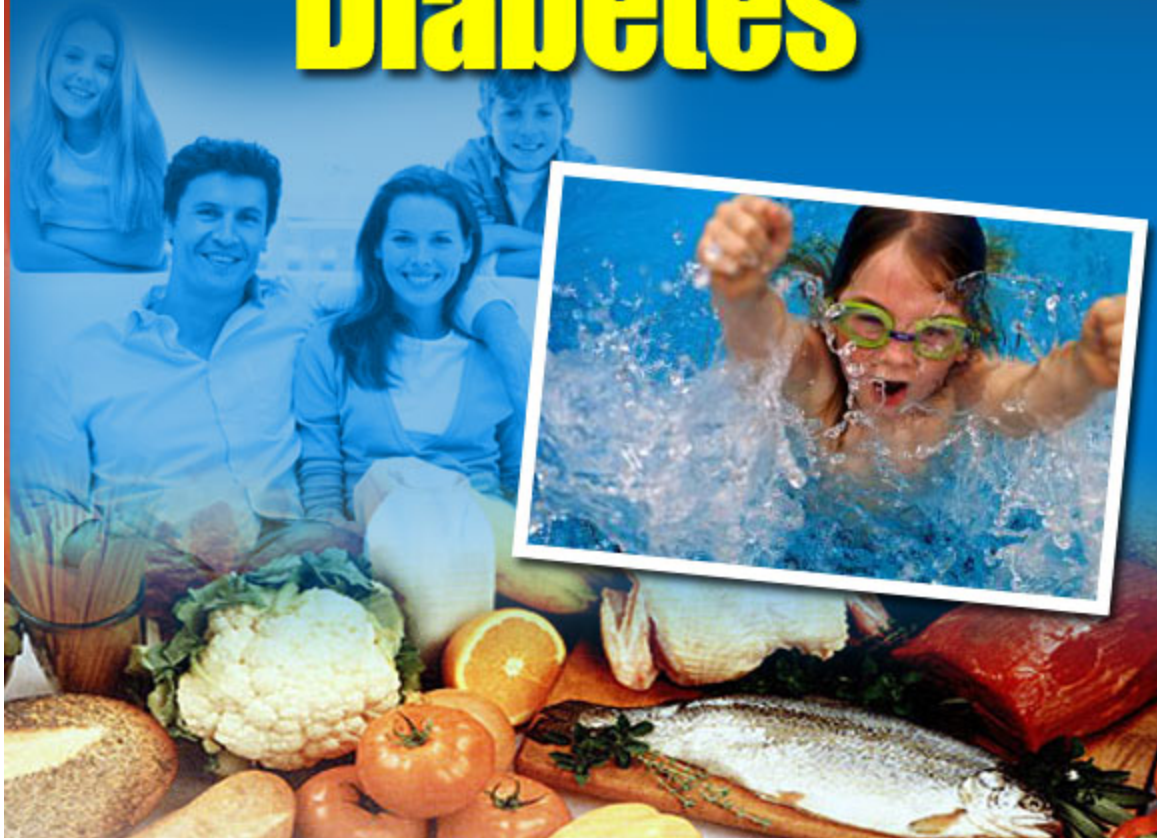
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How to Help Your Child Cope with Diabetes



How to Help Your Child Cope with Diabetes

Diabetes is a complex disorder wherein the blood sugar levels in the body are abnormally high. The condition could be due to a number of reasons from an inability of the pancreas to produce enough insulin, which is responsible for moving the glucose (sugar) from the blood into the cells for use in energy production, or to the inability of the cells themselves to respond to insulin so that glucose remains accumulated in the bloodstream.

Diabetes can affect anyone, regardless of age. In fact, one particular type of diabetes, Type 1 Diabetes or Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus (IDDM) was formerly known as Juvenile Diabetes because individuals who are usually affected are children and young adults.

In Type 1 Diabetes, the body is unable to produce insulin, or able to produce insulin but in gradually decreasing amounts so that the hormone cannot perform its function of facilitating glucose into cells. Because of this malfunction in insulin-production, children who are affected almost always require insulin as treatment.

Knowing that one has Type 1 Diabetes can be scary, both for the parent and for the child. After all, Type 1 Diabetes is a serious illness with fatal consequences if the right steps are not taken. But if you, as a parent, do something to help your child, then there is no reason to be afraid. People with diabetes can live long, healthy, and happy lives.

Step 1: Arm Yourself with Diabetes Information

The first step to any problem is really to arm yourself with as much information as you can get your hands on. You don't go to war with an unknown enemy and with nothing to defend yourself with.

Your child's diabetes is likewise a battle and the only weapon you have at your disposal is information you garnered from your doctor and your own research, plus a few shots of insulin. That is all, and you have to make the most out of it.

Therefore, as early as now, research the nature of diabetes. Below are some diabetes primers to help you:

Conditions

As previously mentioned, diabetes is a complex disorder that includes a number of conditions, all of which relate to the body's inability to produce insulin. Here are a few conditions that you want to prepare for with your child's diabetes:

- ***Hypoglycemia*** – A condition of low blood glucose and sometimes called an insulin reaction. This happens from time to time to every person with diabetes and it is characterized by: shakiness, dizziness, hunger, sweating, headache, pale skin color, clumsy or jerky movements, tingling sensations around the mouth, seizure, difficulty paying attention, confusion, sudden moodiness or behavior changes, etc.

Constant monitoring of blood glucose is required in order to reduce its occurrence to a bare minimum. However, if you observe any of the above symptoms in your child, the quickest method of treatment is to make him/her take glucose tablets, five to six pieces of candy, or a half cup of fruit juice.

- ***Hyperglycemia*** – This is the opposite of hypoglycemia and is considered as one of the major causes of complications that happen to people with diabetes. The word means high blood glucose, occurring when the body has too little or not enough insulin. It could also occur when the body is not able to use insulin properly.

Watch out for the following symptoms of hyperglycemia: high blood glucose, high levels of sugar in the urine, frequent urination, and increased thirst. Again, constant blood glucose monitoring is required to detect the symptoms early and treat it before the condition worsens.

- ***Ketoacidosis*** – This is a serious condition that may lead to diabetic coma or even death. The cause is dangerously high levels of ketones, acids that build up in the blood because of high glucose levels. When there are too much ketones in the blood, this could lead to poisoning, resulting in your body's breakdown.

Ketoacidosis is too serious a condition to treat at home, so treatment often happens in the hospital. However, if you learn to recognize the signs early, then you may be able to prevent the condition all together.

Note these early symptoms: thirst or a very dry mouth, frequent urination (ketones appear in urine if there isn't enough insulin), high blood glucose levels, dry or flushed skin, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, fruity odor on breath, confusion, and a hard time breathing.

Treatments

The goal of every diabetes treatment is to keep your blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible. That is why one of the most important steps in treating

your child's diabetes is to monitor his/her blood sugar levels constantly. This is one way to help your child feel better as well as reduce the risk of long term complications of the disease.

Checking for blood glucose is simple. You only require a blood glucose check or test which contains a special needle, called a lancet. Just stick your child's finger with the lancet to get a drop of blood. There are some lancets that have a spring-load feature, making sticking with a needle a less painful process.

Step 2: Teach Your Child to Manage Diabetes

Your child is helpless against the seriousness of diabetes. He/she looks up to you for support and guidance. He/she may not know or understand his/her condition entirely and wouldn't know the first thing about what to do in order to keep it from worsening.

While you, as a parent, are expected to do all that you can to help your child, there will come a time when you may not be able to. That is why it is important that you impart self-reliance in your child and teach him/her how to deal with diabetes as early as now.

Some of the basics of diabetes management that you want your child to learn include:

- Learning to eat regularly
- Exercising regularly
- Taking insulin regularly

- Monitoring their blood sugar
- Visiting the doctor regularly

As your child grows older, he/she will become more self-sufficient and will be making decisions about his/her treatment and diabetes management on his/her own. He/she may also tend to go to the doctor alone rather than go with you.

At first, it might feel unsettling but this is something that you need to be prepared for. Let things take their normal course, but remain in communication with the doctor, especially if the child is uncommunicative after a visit from the clinic. Staying in the know without stepping over any boundaries is one good way of helping your child cope with diabetes while at the same time boosting his/her self-esteem and confidence in handling the condition.

Step 3: Understand Your Child's Metabolism

Controlling blood glucose levels is a difficult thing to do and even more so during adolescence. Certain bodily changes causes hormone levels in an adolescent child's body to fluctuate, affecting his/her metabolism.

Several studies have shown that the growth hormones, which are activated during adolescent years to promote the growth of bone and muscle mass, can affect the action of insulin in the body. This could complicate your child's diabetes without proper management.

Another hormone that is affected is adrenaline, which is also released by the pancreas, the same as insulin. The function of adrenaline is to stimulate the

release of stored glucose in the body whenever blood sugar levels in the body start to fall.

All these changes could cause the blood glucose levels to rise and fall erratically. They could become too low or too high at a given time and your child may have a difficult time coping with these fluctuations. It is important that you let your child know it is not his/her fault that his/her blood glucose levels are too high or too low, but that is no reason to give up trying to deal with it.

Step 4: Understand Your Child's Lifestyle

While it is true that the situation may be different with diabetes, having this disease does not necessarily mean that your child ought to cease to enjoy life all together. Teach your child this important lesson and help him/her find strategies to manage diabetes without affecting their lifestyle too much.

For instance, your child may want to eat take-out foods, go to parties, and do other things on the spur of the moment, but because of his/her illness, he/she might think he/she can't. This is not true, of course. Let them know that contrary to what they believe, they can still do all these things but in *moderation*.

You have taught them how to be responsible for their diabetes management. Now, it is time for them to apply what they have learned and enjoy their lives despite diabetes. Research shows that children with diabetes enjoy a better quality of life in terms of feeling satisfied with life, feeling good about their health and about how their condition impacts their lives if they keep their blood sugar levels under good control.

Good control does not have to mean eschewing yourself from all the thrills and joys of life. It only means doing what is right for you and your condition and never forgetting that *you* are the one in control, not the disease.

Step 5: Be Aware of Peer Pressure

Diabetes is a fairly common problem. However, your child may still be in the minority among his/her peer group. Physical, emotional, and social issues will arise and your child will have to go through each of them as he/she grows older.

Being “part of the crowd” may be a big deal for your child. With diabetes, that is going to be a bit difficult to accomplish. He/she may feel embarrassed having to check his blood glucose levels every so often or getting insulin shots while in school. The medication is necessary so you cannot forego it. But one way for you to lessen your child’s embarrassment over these things is to encourage him/her to tell his/her close friends about her condition.

Don’t make diabetes a secret. Instead, you can even encourage your child’s friends to learn a few steps in overcoming conditions like hypoglycemia which your child may suffer while in school. They can learn how to recognize the signs and what they can do to help. Take note that this is also another way to help your child build lasting friendships.

Diabetes is a serious problem that affects not only the health of your child but also his emotional, physical, and social well-being. Children with diabetes need all the support they can get, even if there will come a time when they become uncooperative or refuse to monitor their blood sugar. If you feel that your child is

having trouble keeping control of his condition, then perhaps it is time that you seek other avenues of help, such as healthcare professionals and diabetes groups.

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