



NHS Tayside Diabetes Managed Clinical Network Patient Information Leaflet

Exercise and Your Diabetes

Exercise helps improve both your general health and your diabetes control.

Exercise can:

- make you feel good
- help you to control your weight
- improve your circulation
- lower your blood sugar.

Improving health through exercise may help you:

- manage the stresses and strains of life
- reduce your risk of heart disease
- prevent brittle bones (osteoporosis) in later life
- reduce the risk of some cancers e.g. cancer of the colon
- keep you mobile and independent in later life.

You can get all of these benefits from gentle, moderate or strenuous exercise.

How much exercise and physical activity should you do?

- 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on five or more days of the week can improve health.
- If you are new to exercise then think of this as a target level and build up to it gradually. For example, 3 x 10 minute chunks of activity a day.
- **Moderate** means enough to raise your heartbeat and make you feel warm and slightly, although not uncomfortably, out of breath. For example, you should be able to talk.
- **Physical activity** can include gardening, brisk walking, cycling, swimming and dancing as well as playing sports.

How to get started? : Questions to ask yourself

- Can I include more activity regularly in my everyday life?
- Can I use stairs rather than lifts, walk a couple of bus stops or park further away from work or the shops?
- How can I vary my activity so that I don't get bored?

- What time of day is best? Pick a time when your energy levels are highest.
- How long will my activity last and how energetic will I be?

You may need to be examined by a doctor before taking up strenuous exercise.

Exercise, Glucose and Insulin

Depending on the type of exercise you do, you may need to lower your insulin dose if you take insulin to treat your diabetes and/or increase the food you eat to avoid low blood sugars (hypos).

- Gentle activity may not affect your blood sugar levels
- For short strenuous exercise, for example squash, you may need more food beforehand and extra food afterwards at your next snack or main meal
- For prolonged exercise, for example a long cycle ride, football or rugby match, you may need to take extra food before, during and after your activity
- After exercise, your muscles will take at least 1-2 hours to refuel. During this time your blood sugar may still drop so it is important to check your blood sugar levels some hours after exercise to prevent delayed hypos, which may occur in the night .
- Blood glucose levels may fall up to 36 hours after exercise, increasing the risk of hypos at night or even the next day.

Remember that everyone is different and there will be some trial and error involved in working out how to balance your diabetes with your exercise. Your diabetes nurse can help you work out a system that suits you. **Don't stop your insulin.**

Things to Remember if You Take Insulin

- You must do regular blood sugar tests to check the balance between your activity, insulin and snacks. You should do these tests before, during and after exercise or physical activity.
- Ask your diabetes nurse for advice about reducing your insulin dose before planned exercise.
- Make sure that you have some sugar, glucose tablets, chocolate or a sugary drink handy while you exercise. This can be kept in your pocket or bag.
- You may need to eat extra food before and after exercise.
- You may also need to reduce insulin doses later in the day if you have been doing very strenuous exercise, for example hill-walking for several hours
- The absorption rate of your insulin may be different with exercise. This depends on the type of exercise and where you usually inject your insulin.
- The national controlling bodies of some sports, for example solo sailing, hang gliding and some forms of motor sport, do not allow people taking

insulin to participate. These restrictions do vary so ask Diabetes UK for up to date advice (Diabetes UK Careline is 0845 1202960).

Further information:

The Tayside Diabetes MCN website provides information on a number of local activities across Tayside. This can be found in the patient information section of www.diabetes-healthnet.ac.uk

Last update: July 2009
Uncontrolled when printed