

# Diabetes Matters

Volume III of IV

Spring 2000

Welcome to the volume III of Diabetes Matters, the four-part PERS Health Insurance Diabetes Education Series.

Each of the articles in this series were provided by Betty Brackenridge, MS, RD, CDE. Ms. Brackenridge is a former President of the American Association of Diabetes Educators, a founding member of the Advanced Studies Institute for Diabetes Education and the recipient of several national awards for her work in diabetes education.

## Get the most out of your diabetes office visit

Diabetes is a silent troublemaker. It can harm your health but cause few symptoms until problems have become serious. Heart, eye and kidney problems have absolutely no noticeable symptoms at their earliest, most treatable stages. That is why regular office visits are so important. They need to be part of any plan to protect your health with diabetes.

The first step, of course, is to make and keep your appointments. Experts recommend that people with diabetes see their health care provider every 3-4 months. Think of these visits like the regular checks children get to keep them well. They make it easier to do important tasks at a time when you and the doctor are NOT focused on the flu, a cold or something other than your diabetes.

Here are some things you can do to make those visits as valuable as possible.

**Review your glucose records before the visit to find any patterns, problems or questions.**

Bring the records with you. Reviewing food and blood sugar records together can help you and your team work toward better control.

**Ask questions and share your concerns.** Some people become very quiet when they're with the doctor. Tell the doctor what's giving you trouble or concerning you. It's the only way to focus the visit on your needs.

Some common problems encountered by diabetics are:

- Depression
- Low blood sugars
- Bloating or a change in appetite
- Pain, tingling or loss of feeling in legs or feet
- Problems with sexual function

*Continued, next page.*



Take responsibility for getting the basics: HbA1c, blood pressure, and foot checks.

Because these checks have such power to reveal important problems at a treatable stage, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends they be done at least 3 to 4 times a year. You can help your provider and yourself by reminding him or her to complete them. They're too often forgotten when time is short:

**Blood pressure**  
(Goal <130/85)

**Foot check with shoes and socks removed.** Take your shoes and socks off BEFORE the provider enters the room. This increases the chances the check will be done by making it easier and quicker.

**HbA1c (Goal <7%).** This test shows the average of your blood glucose control over the last 3-months. It provides important information in addition to daily blood glucose tests to assure that your overall control is staying near the goal range.

## Important yearly checks

One of your quarterly diabetes visits will also be your "yearly visit." Around the same time each year, expect your provider to order the tests described below. They will help your provider find any diabetes-related problems as early as possible.

**Blood fats.** Heart and circulation problems are one of the biggest risks for people with diabetes. That is why the ADA recommends that you have a thorough check of your blood fat levels each year.

The "lipid panel" should include more than just a total cholesterol number. Also ask for the breakdown between LDL (so-called "bad cholesterol") and HDL (so-called "good cholesterol") as well as your triglyceride level. All of these numbers are needed to understand your current risk for heart disease.

**Kidney tests.** Kidneys are your body's filter system. They filter out things that need to leave the body and hang on to things that need to be retained. Kidneys can be badly damaged by high blood sugars and high blood pressure. This can happen without causing any symptoms that you would notice. That is why it's so important that your kidneys be

checked every year.

There are two important ways to check kidney function. One is a urine test for "microalbumin." Microalbumin are the tiny amounts of protein in the urine. Microalbumin is the earliest sign of diabetes-related kidney problems.

There are also blood tests to measure kidney function. These are used to assess the amount and type of changes in kidney action that have taken place, if any. If your tests reveal signs of kidney changes, there are medicines and nutrition changes that can help.

**Eye exam.** Your eyes are full of tiny blood vessels. High blood sugars and high blood pressure can seriously damage them. This damage will cause absolutely no changes in your vision until the harm is very serious. That is why standards recommend that the insides of your eyes be examined every year. By dilating the pupil or taking special photographs, an eye doctor can see changes due to diabetes at a very early and treatable stage.

Work with your health care provider to see that these important checks on your health are done every year. They will help assure that you have a long and healthy history of living with diabetes.

## Walking very beneficial

A study of more than 70,000 middle aged women by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health shows that both moderately intense activities such as walking and vigorous activities such as running can substantially reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. The researchers, publishing in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that the amount of energy expended is more important than the type of exercise.

## Diabetes with high blood pressure ranked as heart disease risk

Recognizing that the increase in diabetes nationwide as the population ages may lead to a sizable increase in heart disease, the American Heart Association for the first time has called diabetes a major modifiable risk factor for heart disease. Health officials hope the listing of diabetes will focus attention of patients and physicians on preventing or aggressively treating diabetes and its complications.

# Who can help you succeed in diabetes self-care?

You are the most important person when it comes to determining the outcome of your diabetes. After all, you are the one who lives with it every day. However, it's not a job that's easy to do alone. There are many potential sources of help and advice. None can do it for you, but each can help you succeed in certain ways.

**Your Provider.** Your doctor, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant can perform the exams and tests needed to track and protect your long-term health. They may also be able to help you identify and improve challenges to your daily blood sugar control. Because your provider has such an important role in protecting your long-term health, it's very important that you be able to talk to this person candidly about your diabetes.

**A Diabetes Educator.** Learning to care for your diabetes takes time and effort beyond your regular medical office visits. The professionals best prepared to help you learn what you need to know are diabetes educators. Most educators are nurses or dietitians, but other health professionals, such as pharmacists, may also take on this role. Many educators work for hospitals. Others work in doctor's offices or clinics. They may provide educa-

tion in group classes or individual visits. Regardless of the setting or approach, they help you learn how to succeed at self-care. They can often help you with your individual needs and problem solving. Call the American Association of Diabetes Educators for the names of educators in your area. Call toll-free at 1-800-TEAM-UP4.

**Your Pharmacist.** Most people with diabetes take multiple medicines. Your pharmacist can monitor the medicines you take and advise you and your provider about interactions that might occur. Go to your pharmacist when making decisions about over-the-counter medicines like pain relievers or cold remedies. He or she can help you choose varieties that are compatible with your health conditions and prescription medicines.

**Your Health Plan.** Your health plan is here to insure you receive the best possible care for your diabetes. For more information about the specific benefits available to you, call your health plan below:

### **Providence Health Plan**

PLEASE SUBMIT

### **ODS Health Plans**

PLEASE SUBMIT

### **Kaiser Permanente**

Call 813-2000 and select the membership services option.

# Diabetes Resources

## Volume III of IV

The information contained in these resources is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or medical care. Always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health professional with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or prior to starting any new treatment.

### HYPERTENSION

#### W E B S I T E S

American Heart Association  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

American Medical Association  
[www.ama-assn.org/insight](http://www.ama-assn.org/insight)  
*Click on "Consumer Health Information" for information on nutrition, exercise, hypertension, cardiovascular health and type 2 diabetes*

Mayohealth Oasis  
[www.mayohealth.com](http://www.mayohealth.com)

Novartis Foundation  
for Gerontology  
[www.healthandage.com](http://www.healthandage.com)

#### B O O K S

**Conquering High Blood Pressure : The Complete Guide to Managing Hypertension**

by Stephen Wood, George White, Bert J. V. Griffith  
(Contributor)

**Essential Guide to Hypertension : American Medical Association**

by Angela R. Perry (Editor)

### EXERCISE & NUTRITION

#### B O O K S

**The Low Blood Sugar Cookbook : Sugarless Cooking for Everyone**  
by Patricia Krimmel,  
Edward A. Krimmel

**16 Myths of a Diabetic Diet**  
by Amy E. Peterson, Karen  
Hanson Chalmers

**101 Nutrition Tips for People With Diabetes**  
(American Diabetes Assn)  
by Patti B. Geil MS RD FADA  
CDE, Lea Ann Holzmeister RD  
CDE, Patti B. Geil

Read reviews on  
the books  
listed here at  
[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

### DIABETES MANAGEMENT

#### W E B S I T E S

Managing Your Diabetes  
Patient Education Program  
from Eli Lilly and Company  
[www.lilly.com/diabetes](http://www.lilly.com/diabetes)

#### B O O K S

**The Diabetes Problem Solver**  
(American Diabetes Assn)  
by Nancy Touchette, Ph.d.

**101 Tips for Staying Healthy With Diabetes : (& Avoiding Complications)**  
by Sherrye Landrum (Editor),  
University of New Mexico  
Diabetes Care Team

**American Diabetes Association Complete Guide to Diabetes : The Ultimate Home Diabetes Reference**  
by Philip E. Cryer