Tips for Living With a Diabetic

by AFRA WILLMORE

The Do’s and Don’ts of Living With a Diabetic

A diabetes diagnosis doesn’t just impact the person who has received it. Friends and family members may also struggle to come to terms with the diagnosis and what it means for them.

Family life might have to change, whether it involves changes to the usual menu or building in extra exercise, but most people would benefit from these kinds of life reviews.

What is more difficult for the partner, children, parents or even close friends of a diabetic is the secret terror that something terrible might happen to their loved one and they have no control over the situation.

If you're living with a diabetic, here are a few things you need to know that may help you understand your diabetic loved one better, what to do in an emergency, and more.

Knowing What to Do in an Emergency

The media is predictably quite gloomy on the subject of diabetes and even here on this website we frequently warn about the potentially serious or life-threatening consequences of failing to keep good control of blood glucose.

However, day-to-day most people with diabetes notice very little change to their lives, apart from the need to keep an eye on what they eat, keep as active as possible and ensure they take any prescribed medications.

My family and a couple of good friends have confessed that when I was first diagnosed with type 2 diabetes they were worried that I might have some kind of episode caused by high or low blood sugar and lapse into a coma in front of them.

Lots of people know that people with diabetes can fall unconscious if they suffer a “hyper” (hyperglycemic when blood glucose rises too high) or “hypo” (hypoglycemic when blood glucose falls too low) but very few people know what to do if this actually happens to someone.

When I was first diagnosed I shared leaflets from my doctor and diabetic nurse giving advice on what to do in an emergency. I even spoke to my youngest children about what they should do if they couldn’t wake Mummy up – while reminding them not to wake me up in the middle of the night when I would almost certainly just be sleeping the sleep of an exhausted parent!

Also, I am lucky in that if my blood sugar rises or falls I can feel it – I feel dizzy, shaky, slightly sick and “distant” as if I am about to faint.

I have always had enough time to warn people and even advise them what to do, but I still remind all of my family

of the emergency drill from the leaflets every now and again, and keep a copy on the fridge door in case this changes.

I always say, “If in doubt ring an ambulance,” and have shown all of the children how they can do this. Of course, it’s worth reminding them never to call the emergency services unless they absolutely know it’s an emergency.

Day-To-Day Living

So that covers dramatic situations, but what about day-to-day?

If you are living with a diabetic, be supportive when they make good food choices, but avoid nagging them about what they are eating if you don’t think it’s a great choice. The one thing to remember about a diabetic diet is that it’s okay to eat or drink anything – in moderation.

Maybe they’ve had a few too many glasses of bubbly at a wedding, or you spot that their slice of birthday cake is larger than is perhaps wise. Maybe the buffet has proved too tempting or hormones, stress or tiredness is manifesting itself in a desire to overeat or indulge in “naughty” treats.

Instead of pointedly staring at their plate and asking, “Should you be eating that?” try suggesting a distraction like a romantic walk or a bubble bath. Or you could hold your tongue altogether until the next day, and then suggest sharing a meal that helps them back onto the straight and narrow.

Another way you could help is by eating the same healthy food as often as possible, or joining in with any exercise plan. Maybe suggest taking up ballroom dancing, or a sport you can play together as a couple or a family.

If you are a keen cook why not devise some new, more diabetic-friendly versions of your usual favorite meals? Generally speaking high fiber and low GI is the way to go, while keeping a close eye on the carbs in each meal.

There are lots of special diabetic cookbooks and information on the internet about meal planning that take diabetes into account without requiring “special” diabetic ingredients. Even real chocolate or cake is OK every now and again.

All that said, if the person you care about needs tests, really have lost their way with their diet, is avoiding exercise or is not taking their medications, at this point, it is perhaps wise to gently ask if they need help from you or a medical professional.

Making the person you love (who is already probably fed up with their diagnosis) feel like they are abnormal is not going to help them cope with living with diabetes. Making them feel special in all the right ways will.