How to Keep a Diabetes Food, Lifestyle and Symptoms Journal

by AFRA WILLMORE

Keeping a Diabetic Food Log

Everyone starting a healthy lifestyle program starts off with the best of intentions, amazing willpower and hope for a real change.

Whether the change is for weight-loss, general health or to help manage a health condition like diabetes, during the first flush of enthusiasm all you can think about is what you are eating, foods to avoid with diabetes, and how much exercise you are doing and when.

However, it's not unusual for that initial keenness to fade away and for old habits to creep back in, especially if you are looking at years ahead when you need to change the way you live for a lifetime — not just a beach holiday.

If you have been advised to change your eating and exercise habits to help manage diabetes, it might be a good idea to start a journal so you can see the impact your efforts (or lack of them) are having on your condition.

Now I know this sounds like a bit of a chore, but believe me it can be immensely satisfying on the days you manage to stick to your plan. It's also incredibly motivating when you realize a period of less stringent adherence has led to an increase in symptoms or poor glucose control.

You'll notice I don't talk about good days and bad days. It's important not to see a little overindulgence at a wedding or birthday party as a bad day. Diabetes is a long-term condition and life goes on.

It's OK to have a glass or two of wine or a piece of cake occasionally. This is where a journal or tracking app can help so you can ensure a day "off the wagon" doesn't turn into a week, month or a permanent change for the worse.

Where Do You Start?

Firstly, decide if you are a paper or electronic type of person!

I love beautiful notebooks and paper diaries with attractive covers, and I confess I also have a weakness for ring-binder organizers. If you too are a fan, great news: you can buy food and fitness diary inserts for Filofax and other similar organizers.

If you like the idea of having a ready-made journal specially designed for your condition, you'll be glad to know you can buy dedicated diabetes journals, which are laid out for exactly this purpose and may even have hints and tips to make your lifestyle changes more successful.

Check out your local bookstore or even look online on Amazon or eBay.

Tracking With Your Phone or Tablet

Paper books are great, but I do appreciate the convenience of having my smartphone to hand pretty much 24/7, which makes it very easy to enter food consumed and exercise completed throughout the day.

Oddly I find I am more honest with an electronic journal or tracking app. Filling in a paper journal at the end of the day I find it tempting to “forget” the cupcake I ate, or the leftovers I popped in my mouth rather than scraping into the bin.

The other benefit to going electronic is there are a variety of websites and apps specially designed for those with diabetes, and many incorporate a symptom checker and blood glucose recorder, along with other options.

American Diabetes Association’s Tracking

For example, the American Diabetes Association offers a free online food journal, an online activity tracker and a useful tool called MyFoodAdvisor you can use to track calories and carbs throughout the day to ensure you are achieving your goals.

Of course, you can record all of this in your paper journal, but the clever thing about electronic trackers and apps is that they can flag up high and low points and can even share results with your doctor’s office.

You can get free apps and online trackers, but for just a couple of dollars in the app store, you can get more high-tech versions.

Daily Carb Premium

For instance, Daily Carb Premium allows you to set a carb budget and track it, and track all your food and its fiber, carbs, fat, and more. It has a built-in food database with popular items from grocery stores and restaurants and has the option of adding custom foods or details of your favorite recipes.

You can log the date, duration, and intensity of exercise — there are hundreds of default common exercises in the database or you can record your own custom exercise. You can track your weight, work out your BMI, and using the glucose and insulin tracker you can log, study and share your information in a variety of ways.

There are even a lipid panel and a variety of reminders you can set with alarms or text alerts for all of the app’s functions.

This app will also track your water intake and has sections to record your glucose, HbA1c results, blood pressure, heart rate, weight, activity and medications and allows you to send information to your doctor in a variety of formats by email.

It is by no means the only or necessarily the best app on the market but it’s a great example of just how much an app can make tracking easy.

As always, it’s worth mentioning your new journal to your healthcare team, especially if using an electronic app or software that offers the option to adjust your medication according to your results.

Any changes to medication should only be made on the advice of your physician who knows much more about your personal circumstances than any app!

Check out more tracking apps for diabetes in our Smartphone Apps for Diabetes article.