Why You Should Add Exercise to Your Diabetes Management Plan

by AFRA WILLMORE

Exercise for Diabetics

For many people with diabetes, exercise is already a part of their lifestyle, and most can continue with their preferred exercise routine without any risk to their health after a quick conversation with their doctor.

For others, however, getting a diagnosis of diabetes might be the prompt for them to take up exercise for the first time since they left school or stopped going to the gym.

It’s statistically true that many cases of type 2 diabetes are caused or exacerbated by a sedentary life which can often result in, or go hand in hand with obesity.

Living a sedentary lifestyle isn't the only risk factor or cause of diabetes. Even if you are an ideal body weight, you can still benefit from taking up or increasing levels of exercise as part of your diabetes management plan.

How Does Exercise Affect Blood Glucose?

The most significant benefit of using exercise as diabetes management tool is that exercising can help lower dangerously high blood sugars.

However, it’s not a quick fix though.

You can’t do an exercise DVD just before your HBa1C test and hope it disguises three months of cookie-eating. But the good news is that even gentle exercise like walking or swimming – done regularly – can significantly improve those numbers and also extend your life.

So how does this work?

During any exercise which makes you breathe a little faster and your heart pump a bit more quickly makes your muscles use the glucose (sugar) in your bloodstream to give you energy.

Exercise can also make any insulin in your body work better, and the positive effects of exercise on blood sugars and insulin efficiency can last for hours after any workout.

You do have to be careful not to overdo it though. Intense bursts of high impact or strenuous exercise can have the opposite effect on blood glucose and send your levels soaring.

What Are the Best Exercises for Diabetics?

Any exercise that you might love or learn to love is ideal. Of course, you could join a gym where experts could work out a personalized exercise plan taking your diabetes and any other health issues into account.

You could ask for a trial membership at a local gym or check notice boards for classes. Spin, Zumba, aerobics, kickboxing and more. There are a number of classes which will give you a good workout with others.

However, if you're like me, the very idea of activewear brings you out in a cold sweat there are many other ways of building up from couch potato to comfortably active.

Maybe think about taking dance lessons. Ballroom dancing will get you moving with the added benefit that it's quite tricky to munch through a family-sized pack of chips during the cha-cha. Swap the salsa dip with salsa dancing instead!

How about cycling? You don't have to wear Lycra and shave anything to get biking.

Involve the whole family in a weekend bike ride. You can get linked bikes, trailers, and kiddie seats so even younger members of the family can enjoy the ride.

Can I Exercise Without Spending Money?

Times may be tight but having no spare funds for classes, gym clothing or equipment is no excuse to avoid exercise.

Get Outdoors by Walking or Running

Take your children to the park but instead of driving you could walk to the park. Instead of parking yourself on a bench, follow them around and push them on the swings. Or you could organize a game in the backyard that focuses on you having to run around after them.

Meet a good friend for a walk. Fresh air and company can add to the natural endorphins making you feel on top of the world. Just make sure you walk briskly for at least ten minutes to ensure you are getting the full health benefit to your blood sugar levels, heart, and stamina.

Get off the bus a stop or two earlier than normal, park the car further away from the stores or leave it at home altogether.

Cleaning the House Can Get Your Blood Pumping

Exercise for free and end up with a sparkling home too. It's a fact that before we had all the fantastic time and energy-saving devices in our homes, people were mostly slimmer and probably fitter.

I'm not suggesting you abandon the washing machine in favor of scrubbing the laundry in the local river, but there are ways you can adopt traditional housework methods and get some exercise at the same time.

Put some elbow grease into scrubbing the bathroom instead of using a chemical spray, leave and wipe products, sweep your hard floors with a traditional broom instead of running the vacuum round.

Instead of saving all your loads of laundry or piling toys at the bottom of the stairs ready for one big trip upstairs, take each load or individual items in multiple trips. Trotting up and down those steps will raise your heart rate and give your legs and rear end a great workout.

All of these small changes will add up to help you live a healthier life.

Why Should I Exercise? Can't I Just Take Medication?

It's understandable, especially if you've always hated exercise, to think that you can ignore medical advice and move swiftly on from any suggestion of managing diabetes with a change in diet and exercise levels straight to taking meds.

Or if exercise is suggested alongside medication that it’s okay to skip the fitness and just rely on prescription drugs.

Exercising for diabetics is a vital tool in helping you keep as fit and healthy as possible, vastly cutting down the risk of heart and other health issues which are raised if you have a diagnosis of diabetes.

One small step in sneakers, one giant step in living a long and healthy life despite diabetes.