



## Tips for Living with Diabetes

**Diabetes is a common health problem among older people. More than 40 percent of Americans with diabetes are 65 or older.**

When your body digests food it converts much of it into glucose—a kind of sugar that your cells use for energy. Your body also produces a hormone called insulin. Insulin helps you get the right amount of glucose in your bloodstream, which carries it to your cells. When something goes wrong with these processes, the result is diabetes.

**What is diabetes?** Diabetes develops when the amount of sugar in your blood becomes too high, either because your body doesn't make enough insulin (type 1 diabetes), because your body doesn't respond to

insulin (type 2 diabetes), or both. The extra sugar in your blood can damage parts of your body, such as your eyes or kidneys. People with type 1 usually develop diabetes in childhood or as teenagers. Older people are particularly likely to develop type 2 diabetes because your body's ability to manage sugar declines with age. Being overweight can also cause diabetes.

**Diabetes can't be cured but it can be managed.** If you have diabetes, you should work closely with your healthcare providers to keep your blood pressure, cholesterol, and sugar levels under control.

Here's some expert advice, from the Health in Aging Foundation, for older adults with diabetes and their caregivers.

### Make a plan

**Work with your healthcare providers to develop a diabetes treatment plan.**

For many patients, the diabetes educator is an important member of your team who can teach you about the best way to eat and stay active. Medicare will cover a visit to a diabetes educator if you and your healthcare provider think that you need this. Your treatment plan should meet your needs *and your wishes*.

### Make the most of free Medicare services

**If you need more help learning how to keep your diabetes under control,** Medicare will cover a visit with a diabetes educator once a year. Ask your healthcare provider to give you a referral.

### Eat smaller portions

**Eating more small meals** over the course of the day can help keep your blood sugar levels steadier than eating three large meals.

### Choose whole grain breads, cereals, and pasta

**Whole grains have more fiber, and take longer to digest** than white flour and other refined starches. Whole grains, such as whole wheat flour, brown rice, oats and barley, can help keep your blood sugar levels steadier.

## Eat a wide variety of low-calorie produce

Choose bright or deep-colored fruits and vegetables such as spinach, green or red lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, broccoli, squash, or sweet potatoes.

These foods are better choices than white potatoes or iceberg lettuce.

## Avoid sugary drinks and foods

**Drink water or unsweetened tea instead of soft drinks** or other beverages high in natural or added sugar.

Enjoy fresh fruits for dessert.

Avoid processed and prepared foods. These often contain corn syrup, and are high in fat and salt.

## Get moving

**Even small increases in physical activity can help** you control your blood sugar and blood pressure levels, and can help preserve your ability to live independently.

Talk to your healthcare provider about how to get started if you haven't been exercising for a while. If your healthcare provider says it is safe, start with at least 20 minutes of exercise at least three times a week. If you exercise more often, you'll see even greater benefits.

## Slim down

**If you are overweight, losing even 5 to 10 pounds** can help make your diabetes easier to treat. You can do this by both eating well *and* exercising regularly.