

DON'T LET EXERCISE STOP YOU IN YOUR TRACKS

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO BE ACTIVE, MANAGE DIABETES

Depending on the person (and the day), “exercise” can either be a welcome activity – or a dreaded task. Either way, it’s essential for good health – especially for people with diabetes.

“Being active provides huge benefits, from lowering blood glucose (sugar), cholesterol and

blood pressure to helping with weight loss and improving mood,” said Karen Kemmis, a certified diabetes educator with SUNY Upstate Medical University, Syracuse. “The good news is that even for people who are not passionate about ‘exercise,’ there are many ways to be active.”

AADE suggests the following strategies for becoming more active and being as fit as you can.

- **Find your motivation** – Figure out what you want to achieve by staying active. Would you like to be able to play with your nephew or grandchild without losing your breath? Or do you want to lose weight, improve your blood glucose level or have less pain? Whatever your goals, write them down. Make a note of things that are challenging for you now (getting out of a chair, climbing the stairs, running for the train or riding your bike to the store). After several weeks of being active, try that challenging activity again and it should be easier, proof that practice pays off. And don’t get discouraged when you get out of a routine – it happens – just pull out your list of goals to remind yourself why you’re doing this, and start again.
- **Be prepared** – As you get ready to become more active, be sure you wear supportive and comfortable shoes and socks, keep your medical identification with you if you leave the house and carry water. Because activity can affect your blood glucose, check it regularly and be prepared to manage low blood glucose by taking food – such as granola bars and glucose tablets. A [diabetes educator](#) can help you figure out how to manage these issues, as well as what type of activity fits your lifestyle and how to best reach your goal.
- **Build over time** – If you’re new to being active, or reluctant to do so, ease in to increased activity so you don’t overdo it and get overwhelmed. Start by doing five or 10 minutes of activity at a time. Then try to add another five or 10 minutes every once in a while, working toward a goal of 150 minutes a week. That’s less than 22 minutes a day! If following specific directions motivates you, ask your doctor, diabetes educator or another health professional for a prescription for activity.
- **Think outside the box** – If you like to run, walk on a treadmill or participate in spinning class, great. Find working out boring? Watch television, read or listen to music while you do so to help pass the time. If using equipment doesn’t do it for you, there are many other possibilities. Garden, clean your house, walk the dog, go canoeing, go dancing, play a game with family or friends, walk in place while you’re watching television or take a class (Zumba, weightlifting, water aerobics, etc.). Think about things you like to do, or something you want to try. Mix it up so you don’t get bored.
- **Sneak in more activity** – In addition to committing to regular exercise or activity, moving more whenever and wherever you can is a big help. Instead of trying to carry everything upstairs at once, make several trips. Park your car at the farthest end of the lot when going shopping. Get off the bus one stop early. Walk through all of the aisles at the discount store, even if you only need a few items. Instead of calling or emailing a coworker, get up and walk over to her desk. You get the idea.
- **Track your progress** – Use a calendar to keep track of when you are active and how long you spend each time. You could also try wearing a monitor or pedometer to keep track of your activity. Either way, it really feels good to see what you’ve accomplished. Turn it into a game by challenging yourself to squeeze in more activity, whether spending an extra five minutes on the elliptical or taking more steps every day. When you accomplish a goal, treat yourself to a non-food reward such as picking out a new piece of fitness clothing.
- **Partner up** – One of the most effective ways to stay on track is to recruit a buddy. Fitness is more fun, time goes faster and you can encourage each other when you’re working in a pair or group. If you can’t find someone to work out with you, ask a family member or friend to check in with you regularly to see how you’re doing to keep you accountable.
- **Avoid pain** – If an activity causes pain, try something else. If walking hurts your back or knee, ride a stationary bike, or consider water aerobics. A diabetes educator, physical therapist or other health professional can help you find activities that help you get in shape without pain.

In addition to a balanced diet, regular activity is one of the most important things you can do to stay healthy and help keep your diabetes in check. For more information about how a diabetes educator can help you create a plan to get and stay active, visit www.diabeteseducator.org.