

TALKING TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT DIABETES



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR DIABETES

Questions to Ask & Tips for Communicating with Your Doctor

The first step to getting appropriate treatment is to visit a doctor or diabetes specialist. This guide isn't a replacement for a doctor's visit. Here we'll cover specific questions to ask your doctor about your treatment options, especially insulin and medications, and tips to help you generally communicate better with your doctor.

What to Bring to Your Next Check Up

- A record of your most recent blood sugar readings
- A list of all medications you're taking, including any vitamins, over-the-counter medicines, supplements and herbal products
- Notes on any changes in your condition, complications, problems or questions

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Whether you're newly diagnosed, an old pro or anywhere between, an open, continuous dialogue with your doctor about treatment options is important to getting your diabetes properly treated.

Consider asking your doctor these questions about your diabetes to get the conversation started:

Q: What are my ABCs (A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol) and what should my goal numbers be?

A1C is a measure of blood glucose (sugar) levels over the past two to three months. The target for most people with diabetes is less than 7 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For most people with diabetes, the target blood pressure is less than 130/80 and the target LDL (bad) cholesterol is less than 100. Keeping your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol close to these target levels reduces your risk for the long-term problems of diabetes. Ask your doctor to help you choose the best targets for your diabetes and set up a plan to meet those goal numbers.

Q: What is my current risk for diabetes complications? Are my blood pressure and cholesterol levels adding to my complication risk?

Understanding your risks for complications is the first step toward preventing them. For more information on potential complications, visit our "Living with Diabetes" and "Health Center."

Q: What can I do to help manage my blood sugar and prevent diabetes-related complications?

What changes should I make to my diet?

Would it be beneficial for me to see a registered dietitian?

Would losing weight help to control my diabetes?

What can I do to lose weight?
How much exercise should I be getting?

Q: Should I see a specialist?

Is a family doctor or primary care physician (PCP) sufficient to help with this complicated condition? That really depends on whether the “general doctor” in question is up-to-date on the latest diabetes treatments and methods – like newer drugs on the market and a measured, step-by-step approach to improving your blood glucose control. For these reasons, most diabetics are better off seeing an endocrinologist – a doctor specializing in endocrine gland disorders, including the pancreas, the cause of diabetes.

Q: Do I need to take insulin or any other types of diabetes medication?

Physical activity and food choices are pillars of diabetes management, to be sure. But medications and insulin are other powerful tools for lowering your blood glucose. There are many safe and effective meds and insulin options available these days to help you keep your A1C in range (around 7.0% or less), thereby avoiding long-term complications of diabetes and extending your life span. Here are some specific questions you might ask your doctor about medications and insulin:

First, ask: “What are the differences between using oral medication versus insulin? Is one better for me?”

Questions about Medications:

Q: What are my options for medications, and what are the pros and cons of each?
What are the potential side effects of the specific drug you’re recommending?
Are there any dangers of long-term use?
How will I know when it’s working? Or when I should try a different medication?

Questions about Insulin:

What is the difference between the different types of insulin (rapid, short, intermediate and long-acting)?
What type of insulin would be best for me and why?
What are the potential side effects?
How do I know when and how to use my insulin?
What’s the best way to store and care for my insulin?
Where’s the best place to inject my insulin?
I’ve heard insulin is a last resort. Is that true?

How to Communicate Effectively with Your Doctor

Actual face-time with your doctor can be precious little. You may wait for weeks for an appointment and then go through what feels like a whirlwind visit only to leave with more questions than answers about your symptoms and other health concerns.

Studies show the average amount of time patients spend with the doctor is about 20 minutes. Since this is your time with the doctor, make the most of it by asking important questions and expressing concerns.

Communicating effectively with your doctor will allow you to share information and work together to make the best decisions about your health, resulting in the best possible care for you.

Below are some tips for getting what you need from your doctor's visits.

Be prepared. Before your appointment, write down your questions, items to discuss and any changes in your condition. Make a list of things that have happened since your last visit and think about ways to describe your complications and symptoms. If you are organized you can make the best use of your time and your doctor's expertise.

In addition to bringing your notes and questions, try bringing these things with you:

A record of your daily blood sugar tests or your glucose meter with the stored information.

A list of medicines you're taking, including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and supplements

Consider bringing a family member or friend. Having someone along can help you relax and remember to ask the right questions. They can also help you remember what the doctor told you.

Be confident. Don't be afraid to ask questions. If something is confusing ask the doctor to explain more clearly.

Be honest. Make sure your doctor knows the whole story, including the extent of your pain, worries and any treatment or medication you are taking on your own. Don't be embarrassed to share details.

Take notes. Write down important information or instructions, so you can remember the doctor's advice later.

Prioritize your concerns. Remember that you have limited time. Start with the most important topics for which you really want answers. You can always follow up with nurses or with a phone call later for smaller issues.

Repeat key points. Repeating things will help your doctor to clarify anything that has been confusing and will help you remember what has been discussed.

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