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1. Diabetes and Exercise

1.1. *Diabetes and Exercise*

Everybody benefits from regular exercise. In diabetes it plays an important role in keeping you healthy.

How can exercise help

- It helps insulin to work better which will improve your diabetes control
- It can help you control your weight
- It can help lower your blood pressure
- It can reduce your risk of heart disease
- It can help reduce stress

What type of exercise should I do?

This depends on what you enjoy and your level of fitness. Here are some suggestions:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Water aerobics
- Gardening
- Golf
- Cycling
- Exercise bike
- Walking machine

Increasing your general physical activity is also helpful. e.g. taking the stairs instead of the lift, getting up to change the TV station instead of using the remote control, housework.

How much exercise do I need to do?

Ideally, about 30 minutes every day. If this is not possible, then this time can be divided in 3x10 minutes sessions.

How intense does the exercise need to be?

You do not need to puff to gain the benefits of exercise. Aim for moderate intensity. This means you should still be able to talk as you exercise without becoming breathless.

Getting started

Before commencing a regular exercise program, see your doctor for a full medical examination. This is especially important if you have any complication of diabetes. Commence exercising gradually. Start with 5-10 minutes and slowly build up to 30 minutes.

1.2. *Exercise Tips*

- Drink extra fluid before, during (only if prolonged exercise) and after exercise to avoid dehydration.

The fluid may be water, or a sweetened drink if extra carbohydrate is required. 250 ml every 15 minutes or one litre of fluid per hour is recommended.

- Take care of your feet

Wear comfortable and well-fitting shoes.

Always inspect your feet before and after exercise.

Ulcers or other lesions on the feet are a serious danger for people with diabetes. It is important to avoid foot damage especially for middle-aged and elderly people. It is wise for them to avoid exercise that causes stress to the feet (e.g. running).

Exercise which poses minimal weight or stress on the feet is ideal such as riding an exercise bike or brisk walking in good footwear.

- Take extra carbohydrate before and during exercise to prevent hypoglycaemia.

Extra carbohydrate is often needed after exercise.

Monitor your blood glucose levels before, if possible during (at least initially), and after exercise to assess your requirements for extra food.

Discuss adjusting carbohydrate intake with your dietitian.

- Adjust insulin and medication.

It may be necessary to reduce your insulin dose prior to exercise. Insulin adjustment varies with each individual. Discuss appropriate adjustments to suit your exercise schedule with your doctor or diabetes educator.

- Wear sun block when exercising outdoors

Advice for people with type 1 diabetes

- If your diabetes is poorly controlled (i.e. fasting blood glucose levels greater than 14 mmol/L and urinary ketones) then it is best to avoid exercise until your blood glucose has settled.
- Exercise in these circumstances can actually elevate a high blood glucose and increase ketone production.

Advice for people with type 2 diabetes

- Regular exercise is an important part of your management.
- It will help your insulin to work more efficiently and assist with your blood glucose control.