

# Care Giving and Diabetes

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## *A Little Background Information...*

- *What is Diabetes?*
  - [Diabetes](#) is a disease where blood glucose levels are above normal. When you have diabetes, your body doesn't produce enough of the chemical insulin (which helps our bodies process glucose) or is unable to use its own insulin as well as it should. This causes sugar to build up in your blood and can cause serious health complications. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States.
- *What are the symptoms of Diabetes?*
  - Diabetes often goes undiagnosed because many of its symptoms seem harmless.
  - Symptoms of diabetes include: frequent urination; unusual thirst; extreme hunger; unusual weight loss; extreme fatigue and irritability; frequent infections; blurred vision; slow healing cuts and bruises; tingling or numbness in the hands/feet; recurring skin, gum, or bladder infections.
- *Who has Diabetes?*
  - There are two main types of diabetes: type I diabetes and type II diabetes.
  - Type I diabetes is sometimes called juvenile-onset diabetes and it is suspected that this comes following exposure to an “environmental trigger”.
  - Type II diabetes occurs more frequently in the elderly, in obese individuals, in people with a family history of diabetes, in physically inactive individuals, and in certain race/ethnicities (i.e. African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, American Indians, and some Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders).
  - It is possible to have multiple chronic conditions at one time. For example, in 2011, over 55% of diabetic adults in Missouri also had arthritis.

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## ***What to Do After a Diagnosis ...***

- *How to Take Care of Family Members with Diabetes*
  - Learn about diabetes. Talk to your parent or loved one about coping with diabetes and find out what they need. If possible, find ways to help and be supportive. There's a lot to learn about diabetes. The more you know, the more you can assist your parent or loved one as they manage their diabetes.
- *Young Caregivers*
  - Oftentimes the child of a person diagnosed with diabetes becomes their main caregiver. It is very important to keep in mind that these caregivers still be treated age appropriately. Some ways to do this include:
    - Keep things "normal". Make sure they still have experiences outside of caregiving.
    - Watch for signs of stress, such as headaches, backaches and the inability to sleep or eat. Developing a support network with other adults can help ease the young caregiver's burden.
    - Consider their duties a standard chore. Present chores as things that all family members do for each other to contribute, not because one member has too much pain to do them.
    - Choose their tasks wisely. Try to avoid making them uncomfortable by giving them age-appropriate duties.
- *College-age Caregivers*
  - One of the biggest problems that many young adult caregivers face is that they no longer live at home, making it more difficult to be there for their parent or loved one. Here are a few important things to remember about long-distance care:
    - Don't feel guilty.
    - Create a contact list of people who have regular contact with your parent or loved one.

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- Collect important information before a potential crisis such as:
  - Medical
  - Insurance
  - Utilities
  - Financial
  - Legal
- Make visits productive.
- Get familiar with your parent's community resources.
- *Adult Caregivers*
  - Adult caregivers will oftentimes have to deal with the unique situations of either having to care for a parent while starting their own family or having a spouse with a chronic illness. If a parent has diabetes, the coping tips for an adult caregiver are the same as they are for college-age caregivers. Caring for a spouse, however, can present its own set of challenges. Ways to support a spouse with diabetes include:
    - Offer help, but don't become the "diabetes police"
    - Adopt healthy habits for the whole household
    - Help make time for exercise
    - Educate yourself
    - Be prepared for mood swings
    - If sexual problems arise, talk about it

## ***Thinking Ahead...***

- *Are You at Risk for Diabetes?*
  - Risk factors for type I diabetes include:
    - A family history of diabetes
    - A disease or injury of the pancreas
      - Some relatively rare infections and illnesses can damage the pancreas and cause type I diabetes
  - Risk factors for type II diabetes include:
    - Obesity or being overweight
    - Impaired glucose tolerance

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- Insulin resistance
- Ethnic background
- High blood pressure
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Family history
- Age
- *Ways to Prevent a Diabetes Diagnosis if You're at Risk*
  - Maintain a healthy weight and stay physically active
  - Eat healthy
    - Eat vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and leaner meats such as chicken or turkey
  - Manage your blood glucose, cholesterol, and blood pressure levels
  - Don't smoke

## ***Local Resources***

- The Missouri Arthritis and Osteoporosis Program ([MAOP](#)) is dedicated to providing resources to anyone that has to deal with chronic diseases on a daily basis. An [online toolkit](#) is available that provides educational material about living with a chronic condition as well as resources for caregivers.
- There are seven Regional Arthritis Centers (RACs) throughout the state of Missouri. Each RAC offers classes that focus on different aspects of living with a chronic disease, including exercise programs tailored for people with arthritis and chronic disease self-management courses.

## Works cited

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