Take Charge of Your Diabetes

The most important person in your diabetes care is you. Your diabetes health care team members may be the best, but they aren’t there all day to advise you. At home, at work, or at play, you are in charge.

**Teamwork**
Your health care team are experts on diabetes, but you are the expert on you. It takes all of you to adapt diabetes care to your life and to adapt your life to diabetes care.

**Learn about diabetes.** If you are new to diabetes, ask your health care provider to refer you to a diabetes education program and dietitian. Even if you have had diabetes for a while, diabetes education can bring your knowledge up to date and help you with any problems that you may be having.

**Tell your health care provider what your goals are.** Ask for your provider’s opinion. If your goals are not the same, ask why. Then devise a plan for your diabetes care to achieve your goals. Do not agree to a plan that you are not able to or will not use. Speak up about what will and won’t work for you.

**Ask questions.** Write down your questions before your visit so you won’t forget them. Examples of things you may want to ask about are:
- side effects of and interactions between your medicines
- herbs and supplements
- referrals for an eye doctor or a foot doctor
- how to reduce your risk of heart disease and other diabetes complications
- how to cope with your emotional response to diabetes.

Don’t be afraid to ask any question that is on your mind. Bring a notebook to jot down the answers. Or bring a friend or relative to take notes. If you need someone to translate from English into your language, bring an adult, not a child.

**Make the most of your visit.** The time you have with your provider is often short. Plan ahead of time what you want to accomplish during the visit. Are there issues or concerns that are affecting how you care for your diabetes? Are you facing barriers in meeting your goals? Are you struggling with your feelings about diabetes? What questions do you have? Make sure to bring up the one that is most important to you first.

**Bring a list of the medications you take.** Be ready to list any symptoms you have. Take off your shoes and socks when you get to the exam room so that your provider can look at your feet. Answer your health care provider’s questions honestly and fully. At the end of the visit, repeat back instructions in different words to make sure you understand them.

**Follow up.** Don’t assume if your provider’s office doesn’t call with test results that everything is okay. Always call to find out what your results are and ask about what they mean.

**On Your Own**

**Set goals.** Decide what you want to do and create a plan to reach your goal. Focus on what
you need to do each week to reach your goal. Choose steps that are measurable and realistic. For example, start by walking 1,000 steps a day for three days a week and slowly work up to 10,000 steps a day.

**Read up.** Build on your diabetes education. You can find books about diabetes at your local library and bookstore. The American Diabetes Association and the National Institutes of Health websites (among others) give trustworthy information about diabetes.

**Take care of yourself.** Get all the check-ups and screening tests your health care team recommends. It’s the best way to catch problems early when treatment can do the most good.

**Seek support.** Find people to support you and to cheer you on. Seek out a friend or relative willing to listen to your concerns. A diabetes support group can be an emotional lifeline and a way to learn more about diabetes as well.

**Keep good records.** Records of your blood glucose levels, your doses of medications, side effects you have, and factors that may have affected your blood glucose levels will help you and your provider fine-tune your care. A logbook or computer record works better than scraps of paper or your meter memory to look for patterns.

**Use reminders.** Keep your meter at hand, not buried in a drawer or closet. Use timers, sticky notes, or other memory joggers to remind you to take your medicines or check your blood.

**Stay motivated.** Remind yourself of the benefits you hope to gain by reaching your goals. For example, you can watch your grandchildren grow up and be independent. Give yourself a positive message every day. Pat yourself on the back or reward yourself with a CD, book, time spent doing something you enjoy, or something meaningful to you. Recognize your efforts, not the results. And remember, diabetes care is all about you!