

## Staying Well with Diabetes Using Health and Community Supports

This is the third in a series of four handouts that you will get from the Nova Scotia Diabetes Assistance Program.

Other handouts in the series include:

1 Healthy Living  
and Self-Care

2 You and Your  
Blood Sugars

4 Making the Most  
of Your Medications

Living well with diabetes takes a lot of effort and the help of many people. It requires teamwork, and the most important team member is YOU! Along with the medical professionals who are part of your team, your family, friends, and others who live in your community are also very important.

## Where do I get the best care for my diabetes?

Diabetes is complicated. You should get your ongoing diabetes care from a team. The core members of your team include your doctor, along with nurses, dietitians, and pharmacists with special training in diabetes. Each member of the team brings a set of special skills.

Nova Scotia has many Diabetes Centres. The staff in these programs work with your doctor to provide advice and information for you and the people who support you in your care. When you attend one of these programs, members of your diabetes team will

- Help you learn more about your diabetes and the steps you can take to stay healthy.
- Link you to community supports and services such as the Canadian Diabetes Association and other diabetes groups.
- Arrange for you to see other experts, if needed. These could include a diabetes specialist such as an endocrinologist or an internist, social worker, other medical and foot care specialists, and even fitness experts.

Information about diabetes is constantly changing. If it has been more than two years since you have visited a Diabetes Centre or you feel you need more information or support, ask your doctor to send you again. You will need a doctor's referral. If this is your first visit, try to bring along a key support person.

## How do I talk to my health care team?

You may find it difficult to talk to your doctor or other members of your diabetes team. You might be shy, worried, or just overwhelmed. Always remember, these people are there to help you. In order for your team members to do their jobs well,

- Give **correct information** and **ask questions**. Asking questions lets them know how they can help you and what is of greatest interest to you.
- **Be honest** in the information you provide. Feeling you need to always give the "right answer" may not help in the care and advice they give you about diabetes. In fact, incorrect information could make things worse.
- If you **need more help**, let them know. You will be getting a lot of new information. It is normal to need to ask the same questions a few times before you understand well.

## How should I prepare for a visit with my doctor or diabetes team?

- **Make a list of the questions** you want to talk about at your visit.
- **Give your list of questions** to your doctor or diabetes team members at the beginning of your visit. If you have many questions, you may need to make another appointment to get all of your questions answered.
- **Take your record of home blood test** results with you.
- **Take the list of all your medications**, including vitamins or herbal medicines.
- **Bring along a family member or friend** who can listen, take notes, or help with your questions.

### Remember

Programs offered in your community are one of the best ways to stay connected and gain support in managing your diabetes. You are not alone. Many people want to help.

## What do I need to know to make the most of my visits?

- Know what the different diabetes tests are for, how often these tests should be done, the target value for you, and what you need to do to reach your target. Know your ABCs:

**(A) A1C** (pronounced A one C). This test measures your diabetes control over the last 3 months. This is a very important test, and it should be done at least twice a year. The target for most people with diabetes is less than 7 per cent.

**(B) Blood pressure.** High blood pressure makes your heart work too hard. Over time this can lead to strokes and problems with your kidneys, eyes, and feet. Have your blood pressure checked at each visit. The target is less than 130/80 mmHg.

**(C) Cholesterol.** Certain types of cholesterol and other fats can build up in your blood and cause the vessels to narrow and harden. This can lead to a heart attack. Have your cholesterol checked at least once a year. Ask your doctor or diabetes team for your targets.

- Get involved with your team. Set goals for yourself and help to make a treatment plan for your diabetes.
- Ask for your most recent test results and keep a record.
- Find out when you should come back. Make the appointment before you leave the office.

## How can I get support from those around me?

Sometimes, the people closest to us do not always know what they can do to help. Be open and honest with your friends and family. Tell them exactly how they can help you with your diabetes. Here are some ideas:

- Plan meals with the whole family so everyone has something they can enjoy.
- Find a buddy to help you stick to an activity plan.
- Help the people around you learn more about diabetes.
- Ask for help if you are feeling stressed.
- Talk about how you are feeling and what is important to you.

Research tells us that the more support you get from others the better able you are to keep your diabetes in good control. Make sure to tell your family and friends what they do that helps you the most.

Look for people and services in your community that can help you to live well with diabetes:

- Join a local recreation or community centre for programs that interest you.
- Take advantage of the programs and services offered in local grocery stores and pharmacies.
- Find people with common interests (reading, yoga, or diabetes or other self-help groups) to provide support and outside interests.
- Get involved with work or school-based programs aimed at healthy living—walking groups, quit smoking programs, or special interest groups.
- Volunteer your time to help others in your community.

## Where do I go to learn more about my diabetes?

### Your doctor

Your doctor can refer you to a **Diabetes Centre** in your area. For the location of Diabetes Centres in Nova Scotia, visit the Diabetes Care Program of Nova Scotia website [www.diabetescareprogram.ns.ca](http://www.diabetescareprogram.ns.ca). This website will link you to other reliable diabetes websites.

### Canadian Diabetes Association

The Nova Scotia Division of the Canadian Diabetes Association (**1-800-326-7712**) and their website ([www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)) can direct you to valuable resources and information.

### Your pharmacist

Your pharmacist will be happy to answer questions about diabetes, your meter, strips, and any medications you take.

This brochure was developed by the Self-Care Committee of the Diabetes Care Program of Nova Scotia. We would like to acknowledge and thank our partners for their contributions:

- The Canadian Diabetes Association
- The Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia
- Nova Scotia's Diabetes Educators

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## Diabetes Assistance Program

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