

For Parents of Teens with Diabetes

Diabetes is tough to manage, and even harder when you're a teen. A teenager's rapid growth -- physically, mentally, and emotionally -- adds even more challenges to diabetes management.

For the teenager with diabetes, having to take insulin, check blood glucose, and follow a meal plan is tiresome and can compound the normal difficulties of being a teen. It is normal for a teen with diabetes to ease up on diabetes care and try to act like everyone else.

The teen years are a time of testing limits, so don't be surprised if your teen tests her diabetes limits at some point. Teens may refuse to adhere to their eating plan, skip insulin injections, or stop checking their blood glucose. In some cases, the natural consequences of these actions (serious hypoglycemic reactions or hospitalization for DKA) discourage teens from continuing these habits.

If your teen consistently refuses to do certain tasks in connection with her diabetes, first try to find out why. You may find that her diabetes plan is too rigid and adding more flexibility will make things easier. Maybe you and your teen's understanding of her responsibilities differ. To encourage her to take better care of her diabetes, set some intermediate goals and reward her when they are met. For example, if your teen checks her blood glucose only once per day, don't expect her to up her checks to four a day by the end of the week. Set a goal to increase her checking to an average of two a day within a period of weeks. When she achieves that goal, reward and praise her and then set another goal.

It's also a cruel irony that many teens are working to take on more responsibility for diabetes care just when diabetes becomes much harder to manage. The same hormones that cause puberty can make blood glucose levels very unpredictable. Try to avoid blaming your teen for having more high and low BG levels. Instead, try to foster a sense of teamwork, encouraging your teen to work with you in diabetes problem-solving. Find ways to praise her for her efforts -- especially when she is frustrated by unpredictable BG levels.

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