

# Getting Started with Physical Activity

## Toolkit No. 13

**No matter how old you are or what kind of shape you're in, physical activity can do a lot for you.** If you're interested in becoming more active, these steps will help you get ready for a routine that's safe and enjoyable.

- Have a checkup and find out which activities will be safe for you.
- Choose what you'll do for your routine and make detailed plans.
- Find out how physical activity can affect your blood glucose (sugar) levels.
- Learn how to avoid low blood glucose and what to do if it happens.
- Plan how to have water, snacks, and treatment for low blood glucose available.
- Arrange a way to carry medical identification.

Use the checklist on page 2 to check off each step after you've done it. Then you'll be ready to start your new, active lifestyle.

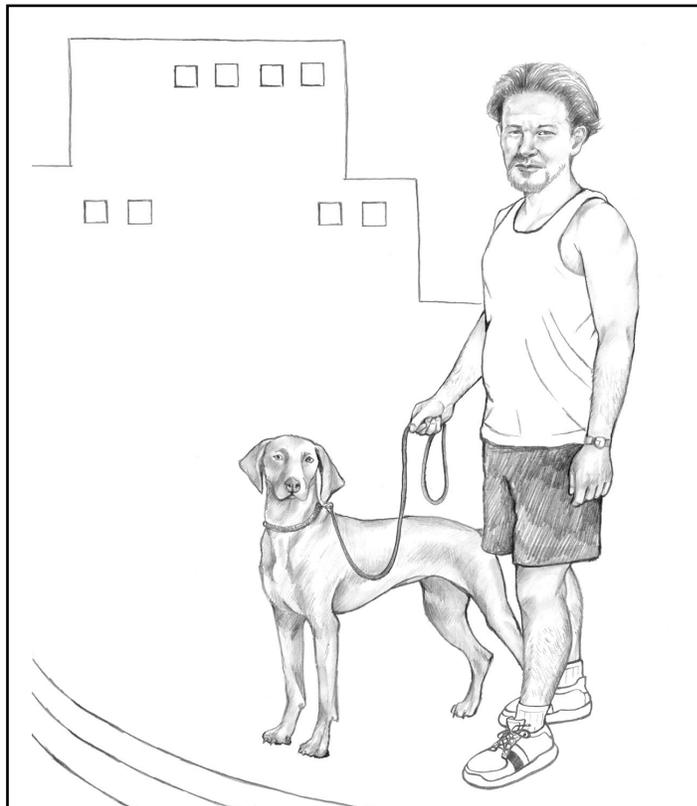
## Have a checkup

Start by seeing your health care provider for a check of your heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, feet, and nervous system. If the tests show signs of disease, your health care provider can recommend physical activities that will help you but won't make your conditions worse. For example, if your feet are numb, you might not notice blisters or other injuries. In that case, swimming may be better for you than walking because you'll be less likely to injure your feet.

## Choose what you'll do and make plans

After you talk with your health care team about activities that are best for you, think about what you'd like to do. First think of ways to be more active throughout the day. For example, you could take the stairs instead of the elevator. You'll also benefit by including these kinds of activities:

- aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, swimming, or dancing



Think of ways to be more active throughout the day.

- strength training, such as lifting light weights
- flexibility exercises, such as stretching

Choose things you enjoy, such as walking with a friend or a dance aerobics class. Try to make your plans realistic and achievable. For example, if you don't have time to walk for 30 minutes at a time, plan on walking for 10 minutes after each meal. If you haven't been very active recently, start slowly and add more activity gradually. Your health care team can show you how to warm up before your workout and cool down and stretch afterward.

Write down what you'll do, where and when you'll do it, how often, and for how long. Think about what you'll do if you can't carry out your usual plan. For more information about each kind of activity, talk with your health care team or request a copy of Toolkit No. 12: *All About Physical Activity for People with Diabetes*.

## Find out how activity affects blood glucose levels

Physical activity usually lowers blood glucose levels. That's why you'll want to check your glucose levels before you exercise. If your blood glucose is below 100 mg/dl, have a small carbohydrate snack such as fruit or crackers.

However, if your blood glucose is high (above 300 mg/dl) even before you exercise, physical activity can make it go even higher. That's when you'll want to be cautious about doing something active. For those with type 1 diabetes, if your fasting glucose level is above 250 mg/dl and you have ketones in your urine, it's best to avoid physical activity. Talk with your health care team about whether to exercise when your blood glucose is high.

You can get to know how various activities affect your blood glucose by checking your levels before and after exercise and keeping track of your results.

## Learn all about low blood glucose

Low blood glucose, also called hypoglycemia, can occur during or after physical activity, even chores like shoveling snow or raking the leaves. If your blood glucose is below 100 mg/dl before physical activity, have a snack. During activity, check your blood glucose if you notice symptoms of low blood glucose such as hunger, nervousness, shakiness, or sweating. If it's 70 mg/dl or below, follow these treatment guidelines to bring it back up to a safer range:

- Have one of these items right away to raise your blood glucose:
  - 2 to 5 glucose tablets
  - ½ cup (4 ounces) of fruit juice
  - ½ cup (4 ounces) of a regular (not diet) soft drink
  - 8 ounces of milk
  - 5 to 7 pieces of hard candy
  - 2 teaspoons of sugar or honey
- After 15 minutes, check your blood glucose again. If it's still below 70 mg/dl, have another serving.
- Repeat these steps until your blood glucose is at least 70 mg/dl.

## Plan what things to take with you

You'll be ready for anything by having water and snacks handy during activity. Make sure you drink plenty of water before, during, and after physical activity to keep hydrated. And always carry a source of carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets, to treat low blood glucose if it happens.

## Have a medical ID with you

You'll want to protect yourself in case of emergency by wearing a medical identification bracelet or necklace or attaching a medical ID tag to your shoes or clothes. You also may want to carry another form of identification during exercise, such as a wallet card.

### What I need to do to get started with physical activity

Get started by choosing something to do today. Place a check mark next to each step after you've done it. If you have a question for your doctor about something, place a question mark next to it and take this list to your next office visit.

- I've had a checkup with my doctor.
- I've learned which activities will be safe for me.
- I've thought of ways to be more active during the day.
- I've chosen ways to do aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility exercises.
- I've made a specific, realistic plan for each type of activity.
- I know how physical activity can affect my blood glucose levels.
- I know how to avoid low blood glucose and what to do if it happens.
- I know when to avoid exercise.
- I'm prepared to carry glucose tablets or other sources of sugar to treat low blood glucose.
- I have a form of medical ID to wear or carry.

