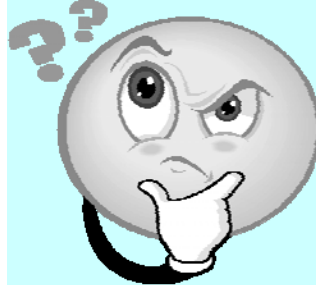


Are You a Stepper?



Why is physical activity important for persons with diabetes?

Physical activity is an important diabetes self-management behavior.

Persons with diabetes should know:

1. Physical activity is extremely important to diabetes care.
2. Walking and dancing are excellent forms of physical activity.

Recommended Conversation

It should be made clear to the person with diabetes that physical activity is an important part of diabetes control. Research has shown that physical activity has many positive health benefits for the person living with diabetes, including lowering blood glucose levels and blood pressure, improving the body's ability to use insulin, managing body weight and reducing distress. Physical activity should become an important part of a plan to control diabetes.

For a few patients, physical activity will already be a part of their daily routines. And they should be strongly encouraged to maintain that routine. Unfortunately for the majority, physical activity will not be a regular part of their lives. For them, physical activity means exercise, which brings to mind huffing and puffing, and sweating profusely. For that reason, they do not find physical activity highly attractive and typically will not commit to it.

It is important that patients understand that they can get many of the same benefits of exercise from milder forms of physical activity. Milder forms of physical activity include the usage of the body to perform routine daily activities and chores. It also includes physical recreational activities. With an expanded sense of physical activity, many people can find lots of different ways to become more physically active.

The idea of "adding steps" is a simple way to put physical activity into a person's life. Walking and dancing are excellent ways to add steps. As for walking, both planned and spontaneous walking should be encouraged. Planned walking is the deliberate setting aside of time for walking (e.g., 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes at night). Spontaneous walking includes any walking that takes place during the day, e.g., while at work, shopping and even at home. Whether planned or spontaneous, stepping is good for the human body.

Dancing is another excellent way to add steps (physical activity) to one's life. Most persons find moving the body to music to be extremely pleasurable. Dancing doesn't have to be done on a night out with another person. Encourage patients to do improvisational dancing at home on a regular basis. Stress the fun and good-for-you aspects of dancing.

Foot care is so important to the person with diabetes, particularly one who will be stepping a lot. Proper foot care should be strongly encouraged, including the use of smooth-fitting socks and well-fitted athletic shoes, and frequent visual examinations. Patients should be warned to report any foot abnormalities (doesn't look or feel right) to their medical providers.

It is very important that patients be made aware that not all physical activities are good for everyone. Encourage patients to talk with their medical provider before starting any kind of physical activity to determine if the activity is suitable for them. Also, remind patients that when exercising away from home that they should always carry something with them to respond to exercise-induced low blood sugar.

Resources

Website: *What I need to know about physical activity and diabetes* (National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse).

http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/physical_ez/

Website with comprehensive coverage of easy-to-understand answers to many questions commonly asked about physical activity and diabetes control.

Handout: *All about physical activity for people with diabetes* (American Diabetes Association).

www.diabetes.org/uedocuments/12-All-About-Physical.pdf.

Simple two-page handout that describes the importance of physical activity to diabetes control and the various forms of physical activity suitable for persons with diabetes.