

Diabetes & Brain Health:

Making the Connection to Improve Your Health

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic health problems. In the U.S., one in 10 people have diabetes and one in three have prediabetes. If you have prediabetes or diabetes, you likely know the things you should do to manage or improve your health. It's recommended that you see your health care provider every three to six months for a diabetes care exam and meet with a diabetes care and education specialist at least once a year and/or when complicating factors impact your diabetes management. Follow your health care team's advice: eat healthy foods, control your weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol, and get out there and be active.

But did you know that diabetes is also tied to brain health? We know that diabetes damages blood vessels. Damage to blood vessels in the brain causes vascular dementia. Researchers have suggested that people with diabetes, especially type 2 diabetes, may be at risk for cognitive decline leading to vascular dementia and in some cases Alzheimer's. Your daily choices can not only help you live healthier with diabetes – they also can help you maintain a healthy brain and lower your risk for dementia.

Healthy Eating

What you eat, when you eat, and how much you eat has an impact on both your blood sugar and brain health. If you have diabetes, are you following your health care team's dietary suggestions?

- Eating meals and snacks on a regular schedule
- Watching your portion sizes
- Eating high-fiber foods, such as fruits, non-starchy vegetables and whole grains
- Avoiding refined grains and sweets
- Eating low-fat dairy, low-fat meats and fish
- Using healthy cooking oils, such as olive oil or canola oil

Physical Activity & Weight Loss

If you have type 2 diabetes and are overweight, losing weight can help you control your blood sugar, cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure. You may begin to see improvements after losing as little as 5 percent of your body weight. However, the more you increase your physical activity and the more weight you lose, the greater the benefit to your body and brain. Physical activity improves blood flow, memory, and encourages beneficial chemical changes within the brain. Increased heart rate during physical activity increases oxygen in the brain. Hormones released during physical activity create a strong environment for brain cell growth. It's recommended that you aim for 30 minutes of activity a day or at least 150 minutes of activity each week.

When it comes to your food and exercise plans, talk to your health care team. Although these guidelines are helpful, individual needs can differ.



Medication & Insulin Therapy

As always, follow your health care team's advice and take your medications and/or insulin as prescribed to help manage your diabetes. While diet, exercise, and other lifestyle modifications complement your treatment they do not take the place of medication.

Blood Sugar Monitoring

Your health care team will advise you on how and when to self-test your blood sugar to help you remain within your target range. You may, for example, need to check it once a day or, before or after exercise. If you take insulin, you may need to do this multiple times a day.

Self-testing is done with a small, at-home device called a blood glucose meter, which measures the amount of sugar in a drop of your blood. You also can use a device called a continuous glucose monitor (CGM). These devices measure your blood sugar every few minutes using a sensor inserted under the skin. Keep a record of your measurements to share with your health care team.

Smoking and Alcohol Use

Smoking and drinking alcohol are known causes of type 2 diabetes. Smoking damages cells and interferes with proper cell function. Evidence strongly suggests that this relates to an increase in type 2 diabetes. Plus, nicotine interferes with the production and effectiveness of insulin. Smokers using insulin to manage their diabetes are found to need larger doses than non-smokers. Smokers may also experience faster cognitive decline than non-smokers.

Whether you have diabetes or not, alcohol consumption increases the incidence of a condition called fatty liver disease – a higher amount of fat in the liver. Alcohol misuse and excessive drinking can also affect brain health. Alcohol can cause mental health problems and potentially permanent brain damage. Drinking in moderation or safely cutting out alcohol all-together can play a role in better brain health.

Join a Healthy Aging Workshop

The Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA), along with its network of community-based providers, offers a wide range of programs that benefit your brain and your body. Whether you want to prevent a fall, manage your diabetes or another health problem such as chronic pain or incontinence symptoms, increase your physical activity or find support for your caregiving role, you will find what you are looking for at WIHA. Check us out at <https://wihealthyaging.org>

For more information on brain health, visit:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dementia/resources.htm>

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(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

wiha

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