

NDSS

National Diabetes Services Scheme

An Australian Government Initiative

NDSS Helpline 1800 637 700
ndss.com.au

You and your health care team

A guide for older people
living with diabetes



Find this resource at ndss.com.au



The NDSS is administered by Diabetes Australia

National Diabetes Services Scheme

The NDSS is an initiative of the Australian Government administered by Diabetes Australia. The NDSS provides information, support and services and diabetes-related products at subsidised prices to people living with diabetes.

Registration is free and open to all eligible people in Australia diagnosed with diabetes.

For more information, visit ndss.com.au or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

Disclaimer:

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice. If you have any concerns about your health, or further questions, you should contact your health professional.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| About this booklet | 4 |
| Work with your health care team | 5 |
| Get help from the health system | 9 |
| Stay on track | 12 |
| Keep your doctor informed..... | 14 |
| Make the most of your doctor's appointment..... | 16 |
| Managing sick days..... | 18 |
| Know your support services..... | 24 |

About this booklet



This booklet provides information to help you work with your health care team and live well with diabetes. It is not always easy to find your way around the health system. You need to work out who can help you with health issues and maintain your wellbeing. As you get older you may have more health issues to deal with, which can add to your challenges. This booklet has been designed to help you understand the health system and make it easier for you to manage your diabetes.

For more information about diabetes, visit ndss.com.au or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**. There are local programs and services available around Australia.

A young woman with brown hair in a braid, wearing glasses and a white lab coat, is smiling and talking to an elderly woman with short white hair. They are in a pharmacy, with shelves of medicine in the background. The young woman is holding a small yellow box.

Work with your health care team

Many people can be part of your health care team and they can all help you live well with diabetes. Your team can be made up of health professionals as well as your family. But YOU are the most important member, because you make the day-to-day decisions about your diabetes.

It can be a bit daunting to work out how all the various health professionals fit into the health system, and how each one can help you.

Following is a list of health professionals you may wish to have in your health care team. You will not necessarily need to include all the people mentioned here. Talk to your doctor or diabetes educator about who can help you now or in the future, and remember that you and your family are the most important members of your team.

| Health care team member | What they do/how they can help | Add the contact details for your team members |
|--|---|---|
| General practitioner (GP) | The doctor who plays a key role in your general health as well as monitoring your diabetes and helping you manage it. | |
| Credentialed diabetes educator (CDE) | A health professional who is a specialist in diabetes who can help you understand and manage your diabetes. | |
| Practice nurse | A nurse who works with your GP and can help you manage your diabetes. | |
| Nurse practitioner | A nurse who works with other health care providers. They have done additional training and can prescribe some medicines and order blood tests and some other tests. You will sometimes see one who is specialised in diabetes or aged care. | |
| Dietitian or Accredited Practising Dietitian | A health professional who can work with you to discuss and plan healthy eating. | |
| Podiatrist | A health professional who can help you with foot health problems and keep your feet healthy by assessing, monitoring and treating any issues. | |

| Health care team member | What they do/how they can help | Add the contact details for your team members |
|--|---|---|
| Exercise physiologist or physiotherapist | A health professional who can provide advice and support about being physically active. They can create an exercise plan just for you. | |
| Pharmacist | A health professional who can give you advice about how and when to take your medicines, how they work, and possible side effects. | |
| Endocrinologist | A specialist diabetes doctor who can give you expert advice on how to manage your diabetes. Your GP will refer you to an endocrinologist if needed. | |
| Geriatrician | A doctor who specialises in the care of older people and can help with more serious health concerns and issues to do with memory loss. Your GP will refer you to a geriatrician if needed. | |
| Optometrist | A health professional who can monitor your eyes for any changes and arrange treatment with an ophthalmologist if needed. They also look after your prescription glasses and contact lenses. | |
| Ophthalmologist | A specialist doctor in eye health who can diagnose problems; prescribe medicines or undertake any necessary treatment. | |

| Health care team member | What they do/how they can help | Add the contact details for your team members |
|---|---|---|
| Dentist | A health professional who can help keep your mouth, teeth and gums healthy through preventive care and treatment. | |
| Audiologist | A health professional who can assess and help with your hearing loss. | |
| Psychologist or clinical psychologist | A health professional who can help with stress, anxiety or other emotional or psychological concerns, and give you coping strategies. | |
| Social worker | A professional who can provide emotional and practical support, counselling and information. | |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner | A health professional who can help support you with your diabetes and can connect you with other health professionals. | |



Get help from the health system

The Australian Government has a range of programs and plans that can help older people living with diabetes. If you are eligible, your doctor can help organise access for you.

Following are some programs/plans you could talk to your doctor about.

| Program/plan | How it may help you |
|-----------------------|---|
| GP Management Plan | A GP Management Plan is a plan written by your GP that describes your health care needs, sets out the services your GP will provide, and explains steps you can take to manage your condition yourself. It is a free service. |
| Team Care Arrangement | If you and your GP agree that you would benefit from other health care providers being involved in your care, your GP may suggest preparing a Team Care Arrangement (TCA). With your consent, this arrangement will give you access to at least two other health care providers for up to five sessions per calendar year. If these other providers bulk bill (only charge the Medicare rebate), there will be no charge for this service, so check this when you make your first appointment. If you have private health insurance, you may decide to use that to help pay for these services instead of having a TCA. |
| Home Medicines Review | If you are concerned about the number of medicines you are taking and how they interact, you can ask your doctor to arrange a Home Medicines Review. This Medicare-funded service has a pharmacist visit your home, review your medicines and routine, and provide your GP with a report. From there, your GP works with you on any adjustments required. It is a free service. |
| Diabetes MedsCheck | A Diabetes MedsCheck is a free service that gives you one-on-one time with your pharmacist in the pharmacy to discuss all your medicines. It can be really helpful to work with your pharmacist, as they can help you get the best benefit out of your medicines. It is a free service. |



| Program/plan | How it may help you |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Aged Care Assessment Team/Service | <p>An Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) assessment can be organised by your GP if you need some extra help at home or if you are thinking about moving into an aged care facility. In most states it is called ACAT, while in Victoria it is called Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS). Some people feel worried about the idea of an assessment, but it is just a way of working out how much help you need and what type of care or services you are eligible for. It is a free service. For the most up-to-date information about ACAT or ACAS and getting help at home, visit myagedcare.gov.au or call 1800 200 422.</p> |



Stay on track

As you get older, you may need to change the way you manage your diabetes. There may be additional challenges if you develop other health issues that may affect your diabetes. If you have the following checks done, you can identify and address any problems early on.

| How often | Who you should see |
|--|--|
| At least every 3 months | |
| Visit your doctor to review your diabetes and blood glucose levels | GP |
| At least every 6 months | |
| Get your blood pressure checked | GP, or endocrinologist (if your doctor has referred you to one), diabetes educator, registered nurse, nurse practitioner or practice nurse |
| See your dentist, even if you wear dentures | Dentist, dental hygienist |
| At least every 12 months | |
| Have your memory assessed | GP |
| Have your hearing assessed | GP, audiologist |
| Have your cholesterol levels checked | GP, endocrinologist or nurse practitioner |
| Have your HbA1c* level checked | GP or endocrinologist |
| Have a kidney test | GP or endocrinologist |
| Have your diet reviewed | Dietitian |
| Have your feet checked and treated | Podiatrist, GP or practice nurse |
| Have your medicines reviewed | Pharmacist, GP or endocrinologist |
| Have your diabetes management reviewed | Diabetes educator, GP or endocrinologist |
| At least every 2 years | |
| Have a comprehensive eye examination | Optometrist or ophthalmologist |

*HbA1c is a blood test that shows an average of your blood glucose level over the past 10–12 weeks.



**Keep your
doctor
informed**

The following issues may not affect you, but it is important to tell your doctor if you:

- have blood glucose levels that are regularly higher or lower than your target range
- lose your appetite or appear to be losing weight without trying
- have problems with tummy upsets or indigestion, or problems swallowing
- have incontinence, constipation or other problems with your bowels or passing urine
- have had a fall
- have a sore mouth or problems with your teeth or dentures
- often feel confused or forget things
- feel sad or worried for more than two weeks
- have problems with sexual health or wellbeing
- have new pain that is concerning you, or are feeling sore or uncomfortable
- have trouble taking your medicines
- have an infection in any part of your body
- have trouble doing your blood glucose testing
- have trouble doing household jobs such as cleaning, cooking or shopping
- are taking any over-the-counter medicines or other drugs, or any herbal medications, vitamins or supplements.

You should also let a friend or family member know if you are sick or having problems with your diabetes or everyday activities.

A young woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and a blue wristband, is smiling and looking towards an older woman. The older woman has short, curly white hair, wears glasses and a white t-shirt, and is looking back at the younger woman. They appear to be in a clinical or healthcare setting.

Make the most of your doctor's appointment

It is not unusual to feel embarrassed or overwhelmed if you do not understand something your doctor said. Try not to let this worry you, and ask your doctor to explain it again. It is also fine to ask your doctor to spell medical words, draw a picture or write information down for you—they want you to understand as much as possible.

The following tips may help you to get the most out of your visit to your doctor:

- 1. Make a list of questions.** Before your visit, write down a list of things you want to ask your doctor, putting the most important things at the top of the list. If you do not think you can ask all your questions in a short appointment, book a long appointment.
- 2. Bring a list of all your medicines and daily dose.** This should include any drugs or other medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines and herbal or vitamin supplements. Ask about side effects, the best time to take your medicines, and what to do about your medicines if you feel unwell.
- 3. Take your blood glucose meter and diabetes record book (if you test your blood glucose levels).** This is important information for your doctor and other professionals helping you manage your diabetes.
- 4. Take a pen and paper.** You may need to write down the answers to your questions and other things you need to remember.
- 5. Ask a friend or family member to go with you.** This will help you keep track of important information.

A close-up photograph of an elderly person's hand and wrist. The person is wearing a red knitted sweater and blue denim jeans. A white continuous glucose monitor (CGM) sensor is attached to their wrist with a black strap. Their thumb is resting on the sensor. The background is blurred, showing more of the red sweater and blue jeans.

Managing sick days

You may find it harder to manage your diabetes when you are sick. When you are feeling unwell, you need to take extra care.

It is important to be prepared for when you are sick—have a personalised sick day management plan ready to use at the earliest sign of feeling unwell. Write a sick day management plan with your doctor or diabetes educator. Make sure that you give a copy of the plan to your family and friends so they also know what to do.

Your sick day plan should include the following steps:

| ✓ Step | Example | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| 1. When to use this plan | When you are feeling unwell. When your blood glucose levels are high (usually 15mmol/L) for a certain amount of time (discuss with your doctor or diabetes educator). | | |
| 2. Who to contact | Family, friends and neighbour. Include doctor or diabetes educator’s contact details. If you live alone, it is important to tell someone you are unwell so they can check on you. | | |
| 3. Monitoring | Note | Type 1 | Type 2 |
| Blood glucose levels | | Every 2 hours | Every 2–4 hours |
| Blood ketone levels | If you have type 2 diabetes, there are certain circumstances where it is appropriate to check your blood ketone levels. Ask your doctor or diabetes educator for advice if you are taking a type of medicine called a SGLT2 inhibitor*. | Every 2 hours | Usually not necessary, unless you are taking a SGLT2 inhibitor.* |
| 4. Medicines | If you have been vomiting or have diarrhoea, you may need to stop certain medicines e.g. metformin, empagliflozin (Jardiance), dapagliflozin (Forxiga). | N/A | Discuss this with your doctor. |
| 5. Insulin | Ask your doctor or diabetes educator to work out a dose adjustment plan with you. | Never stop your insulin. Insulin dosage may change depending on glucose levels, ketones and any vomiting and diarrhoea. | |

| ✓ Step | Example | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | Note | Type 1 | Type 2 |
| 6. Drinking and eating | Keep drinking and eating if possible. It's important to drink extra fluid every hour to avoid becoming dehydrated. Discuss with your doctor or diabetes educator what is right for you. | Continue to eat regularly and drink half a cup (125ml) of unsweetened fluid every hour. If you are unable to eat and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • your blood glucose level is below 15mmol/L: drink sweetened fluids • your blood glucose level is above 15mmol/L: drink unsweetened fluids. | |
| 7. Know when to go to hospital or contact your doctor | Go to the hospital or call your doctor immediately if you: | | |
| | Are concerned about low blood glucose levels or experiencing hypoglycaemia (hypo). | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Have ketones that are moderate to high. | ✓ | Usually not necessary, unless you are taking a SGLT2 inhibitor.* |
| | Have high BGLs and you don't know what to do. | ✓ | ✓ |

| ✓ Step | Example | | |
|--------|---|--------|--|
| | Note | Type 1 | Type 2 |
| | Can't keep food or fluids down and have persistent vomiting, diarrhoea and/or abdominal pain. | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Continue to be unwell, become drowsy or breathless. | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Have a 'fruity' odour to your breath (you may be at risk of diabetes ketoacidosis). | ✓ | Usually not necessary, unless you are taking a SGLT2 inhibitor.* |
| | Are unsure what to do (and your support person is also unsure). | ✓ | ✓ |

***There are certain diabetes medicines that do place you at risk of ketones. These medicines are called SGLT2 inhibitors, including: canagliflozin (Invokana®), dapagliflozin (Forxiga®), empagliflozin (Jardiance®) and ertugliflozin (Steglatro®). Ask your doctor or diabetes educator if you are taking any of these medicines.**

If you feel hesitant to bother other people when you are unwell, remember it is often better to get help early, rather than waiting. Make sure you let those on your contact list know when you are feeling unwell. If you are not sure whether you need an ambulance, it is better to be safe and check. Ring **000** and talk to the operator, and they will help decide whether you need an ambulance or some other service. Your safety is the most important thing.

If you have a mobile phone or a digital home phone, it is a good idea to program essential numbers into that phone. You can also fill in the missing numbers in the following table and keep it handy so you can find it quickly if you—or if a relative or friend—needs to call for help.

| Contact | When | Phone number |
|---|---|--------------|
| Ambulance | If you are seriously ill, or if you are not sure whether you need to go to the hospital. | 000 |
| Healthdirect Australia | If you are sick after hours and you are not sure what to do. | 1800 022 222 |
| Your doctor | If you are sick during surgery hours and you want to see a doctor or are not sure what to do. | |
| Your diabetes educator, community nurse or care coordinator | For information or advice. | |
| Your emergency contact (family or friend) | To let them know you are unwell, especially if you feel worse. | |

If you do not already have a personal alarm, you may want to consider obtaining one. Personal alarms are devices that can be used to alert a family member, a friend or a monitoring service in a medical emergency. If you live alone, a personal alarm may help you to feel safe and stay independent in your own home. It will also reassure your family and friends that if you are in trouble you can easily call for help. Talk to someone in your health care team if you think this might help you.



An elderly woman with short, curly white hair is seated and talking on a white corded telephone. She is wearing a white cardigan over a white top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white curtain. A green rectangular box with white text is overlaid on the lower left of the image.

Know your support services

In addition to your health care team, there are a lot of organisations that can help you manage your diabetes and general health. The following list names a few and explains what they can do to help you.

| Who | What they do | Contacts |
|--|---|--|
| National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) | Support people with diabetes by giving them access to reliable and affordable services and products. | Australia-wide NDSS Helpline on 1800 637 700 ndss.com.au |
| State and territory diabetes organisations | Provide a wide range of support services, including up-to-date information to help you better understand your diabetes. | You will be directed to your state or territory diabetes organisation by calling the NDSS Helpline on 1800 637 700 Australia-wide or go to diabetesaustralia.com.au |
| My Aged Care | Established by the Australian Government to help you find your way around the aged care system. | Australia-wide 1800 200 422 myagedcare.gov.au |

You can phone the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700** from anywhere in Australia. You can also access NDSS products from pharmacies, often referred to as NDSS Access Points, from any location in Australia, even if you are away from home.

Notes

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[illegible]

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ndss.com.au