

# Supporting a Person with Diabetes

## Support Person Fact Sheet

### Key Facts

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) have a significantly higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those without I/DD. It is important to talk to people with I/DD about prevention to reduce their risk of developing diabetes.

Speak to people who have diabetes and I/DD in a way that is clear and easy to help them understand how to follow the treatments and recommendations prescribed by their doctor, as well as the importance of these recommendations for their health.



### Risk Factors for Diabetes

- Overweight
- Poor diet
- Low levels of physical activity
- Smoking
- Low compliance with medication regimes
- High blood pressure/ cholesterol



### Lifestyle Habits to Reduce Risk of Diabetes

Determine if the person you support is at risk for diabetes and talk to them about lifestyle changes that could reduce risk.

#### Diet

- Reduce intake of fats and sugar.
- Eat smaller portions of carbs, such as potatoes, bread, and pasta, which are converted into sugar when digested.
- Increase intake of vegetables and fiber.

#### Physical Activity

Go on walks throughout the day or walk instead of drive when possible.

#### Smoking

Consider nicotine replacement therapies.

### Communicating with a Person with I/DD who has Diabetes

- Communicating with the person about diabetes in a way they understand, is an important part of supporting them so they can monitor their condition and seek out other supports as needed.
- Encourage medical staff to speak to the person directly, not just to their support person.
- Speak slowly and clearly, facing the person.
- Pause in between thoughts to make sure they understand.
- Check for understanding by asking clarifying questions, or repeat main points if necessary.
- Involve the support person in the conversation rather than talking about the person with diabetes.
- Find out who is providing support and involve them in conversations so all are aware of recommendations for successfully managing healthcare needs.

## What to Say

The person you support may have limited knowledge of diabetes. Complicated descriptions and too much information can cause confusion and anxiety.

- Use plain language instead of complex medical terminology when possible.
- Break down difficult information into smaller pieces and check for understanding.
- Use easy read leaflets, visual aids, and online videos to support conversations about diabetes, but do not use them to replace conversations.

## Start with what the person does now

Some people have set eating routines that need to be understood before they can be adapted. Talk about what they like and don't like before suggesting changes. Some helpful tips include:

- Suggest gradual changes and explore “swaps”, like replacing full sugar drinks with diet drinks or using sparkling water with a lemon wedge instead of soda.
- Find out who shops and cooks and involve this person in conversations.

## The Importance of Physical Activity as Well as Diet

People with I/DD often have low levels of activity and may not be aware of the importance of exercise in managing diabetes. Explain that being active is as important for their health as their diet. Find out what activities they enjoy and find ways to support their participation in those activities. Some people feel more comfortable doing activities arranged specifically for people with I/DD, while others may enjoy going to an exercise facility. Be sure to ask the person and help support their preferred choice.



## Related fact sheets:

Support Person Fact Sheet: Encouraging Preventative Health Care

This fact sheet was created in June 2021.

The fact sheet contains general information only and does not take into account individual circumstances. It should not be relied on for medical advice. We encourage you to review the information in this fact sheet within the context of educational purposes and when appropriate, share it with your health professional to decide whether the information is right for you.

This module was adapted from NSW Council for Intellectual Disabilities (2009), Australia. The toolkit and its components were supported in part by the grant or cooperative agreement number DD000014, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and by the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Administration on Community Living grant #90DDUC0039. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Administration on Community Living, or the Department of Health and Human Services