

Essential advice for parents of  
kids with diabetes from **Accu-Chek**<sup>®</sup>

Roche

*Kids with  
Diabetes*

Diabetes matters

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## Introduction:

Kids with diabetes are just like kids without diabetes—they strive for a little more independence each year. They want to receive positive reinforcement from their parents and they don't like to stand out from the crowd. As a parent we want our children to be happy and carefree which often means having lots of friends, going to kids parties, participating in sports and having as much fun as possible. A diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes in your young child may leave you feeling that the above will not be possible. However, over time, and with patience and some adjustments, you and your child will learn to manage this “new normal”.



Unfortunately, an increasing number of young children are being diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes (T1D), with 15-20% of new diagnoses occurring in children under the age of 5<sup>1</sup>. The reason for the increased incidence is unknown however as a parent being told that your child has diabetes may leave you feeling overwhelmed, anxious, upset and angry. Feeling this way at the time of diagnosis is completely natural but it is important to keep in mind that the diagnosis of T1D is not something you or your child could have had any control over or responsibility for. T1D is an autoimmune condition that happens when the pancreas stops producing insulin, the hormone that controls blood glucose levels<sup>2</sup>. In other words, T1D develops when the insulin-producing pancreatic beta cells are mistakenly destroyed by the body's immune system<sup>2</sup>. The cause of this attack is still being researched, however scientists believe that genetic and environmental components may be behind this condition, however at this stage there is nothing anyone can do to prevent T1D<sup>2</sup>.



# Adjusting to the diagnosis of T1D

Being diagnosed with T1D at a young age will mean a lifelong requirement to implement certain daily, sometimes complex and time-consuming medical practices<sup>1</sup>. As the parent and main caregiver, much of this responsibility will lie with you. Research has shown that the diagnosis period is marked by overwhelming feelings of fear, worry and self-doubt<sup>1</sup>. Many parents may feel isolated and alone as family members and friends fail to understand diabetes care and do not participate in T1D care leaving the entire responsibility with the parents<sup>1</sup>.

The information in this leaflet is designed to give you some tips and guidelines to manage the transition from being a parent of a child to being a parent of a child with diabetes.



## Explaining diabetes to your child

There are many helpful videos on YouTube that you can access which will help explain diabetes to your child such as this one from Health Nuts Media which can be found at:

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EEtubB74IM>**<sup>3</sup>

Videos like these will help you and your child to better understand diabetes. It is important to reiterate to your child that diabetes is not their fault and was not because they did something wrong.



## Become experts in T1D management

Work with your child's Health Care Professional team to learn as much as you can about T1D and the management of the condition. Be patient with yourself as this will take time. Diabetes is a complex condition and you will not be able to know everything there is to know from Day 1.

A great source of information with valuable and fun tools is the Novo Nordisk "Changing Diabetes in Children (CDiC)" Website<sup>4</sup>. See the link here: **<https://www.novonordisk.com/sustainable-business/performance-on-tbl/access-to-care/changing-diabetes-in-children.html>**



## Download the Patient Booklet<sup>4</sup> that is available for comprehensive information on:

- Insulin (How to inject, when to inject, type of insulin, why you need insulin)
- Hypoglycaemia & Hyperglycaemia (What it is, symptoms, how to treat it)
- What to eat
- How to check your blood glucose



**REMEMBER: These tools are there to assist you and your child understand and manage his or her diabetes but always consult first with your Healthcare Professional for medical advice.**



### **Blood Glucose monitoring**

Being able to monitor their blood glucose is an essential part of the day-to-day management for a child or young person with diabetes. Regular monitoring lets one know when insulin may be needed to correct high blood glucose or when carbohydrates may be needed to correct low blood glucose.

Together with your Health Care Professional, you will agree the individual targets that your child should aim to achieve as well as how often to check. Your doctor will also recommend which blood glucose meter or Insulin pump you should use based on your child's specific needs.

### **To check your blood glucose you will need the following:**

- Warm soapy water to wash your hands and a clean towel to dry them
- A lancing device recommended by your Health Care Professional
- A blood glucose meter with the applicable blood glucose strips (Check the expiry date first to ensure your strips are not expired)

## Follow these basic steps below when using your blood glucose meter:



1. Wash and dry your hands



2. Insert the test strip into the meter



3. Prick your finger with the lancing device (Always dispose of the lancet in a hygienic and safe manner)



4. Apply a small drop of blood to the test strip



5. Wait for the result to appear



Make sure to take your blood glucose meter with you when you go to see the doctor or diabetes educator.

As your child gets older and starts to enjoy the world of digital apps, consider making use of a diabetes management app such as mySugr to simplify their daily diabetes management.

The mySugr app is compatible with most smart phones and is used and loved by more than **1,000,000** people with diabetes worldwide<sup>5</sup>. Pair it with a Bluetooth enabled blood glucose meter and automatically capture readings (no need for a manual logbook) and share these with your healthcare professional.



A list of compatible mobile devices with more information on the app can also be found at [www.accu-check.co.za](http://www.accu-check.co.za).



## What about the numbers?

Low blood glucose can be very dangerous and therefore it is important that both you and your child (as they grow older) are aware of how to recognise the symptoms or feelings he or she may have when their blood glucose is low<sup>6</sup>. Common symptoms of low blood glucose are<sup>6</sup>:

-  Sweating
-  Extreme hunger
-  Itchy lips
-  Difficulty talking
-  Irritability / Crying without reason
-  Trembling, dizziness
-  Tiredness
-  Blurred vision

If you or your child suspects their blood glucose is low it is key to Act Fast. If possible, check your glucose with a blood glucose meter and immediately treat the low by consuming 15g of fast-acting (easily-digestible) carbohydrates<sup>6</sup>.

When it comes to regular blood glucose checks try to always send positive messages. If your child feels guilty about "bad" blood glucose levels, things may get even worse. Instead, don't talk about good and bad results. Think in terms of high, low and normal—with no judgment attached<sup>7</sup>.

Help achieve normalcy<sup>7</sup>. Remember that your child is a child first, and a person with diabetes second. Try to help them feel like the rest of the kids. Before birthday parties, for example,

talk to the doctor about whether cake and ice cream might be okay—maybe extra insulin or exercise can help cover the additional carbohydrates. Or offer to bring a diabetes-friendly dessert to the party. That way, your child won't feel left out of the fun.

## Healthy Eating



Dietary intake and mealtime behaviours play an integral role in overall T1D management.<sup>1</sup> In addition, because insulin will be part of the treatment plan, it will be necessary for you and your child to learn the carbohydrate quantity in many foods in order to ensure that you can inject enough insulin before mealtimes so as to avoid high blood glucose. However, it can be challenging at the best of times to get children to eat balanced and nutritious meals at scheduled mealtimes.<sup>1</sup>

Insulin dosage, which is largely based on predicted food consumption, can be difficult to estimate in advance. Many parents choose to give insulin after meals in case the child does not finish his food, despite the fact that T1D control may be compromised by not administering the insulin pre-meal.<sup>1</sup>

Work with your child's dietitian or diabetes educator to draw up a list of meals that are healthy but enjoyable for your child. Discuss whether to inject insulin before or after meals based on your child's behaviour. Below is a list of ideas for some in-between healthy snacks whether at home or school<sup>8,9</sup>:

- Frozen fruit such as blueberries, strawberries etc
- Air popped popcorn
- Sweet potato chips
- Cream cheese pickle wraps (spread cream cheese around each pickle and wrap with some lean beef)
- Fresh fruit such as apple slices
- Veggie sticks (cucumbers, red peppers, carrots)

- Cucumber and hummus
- Leafy turkey / chicken wrap (lettuce spread thinly with peanut butter and a slice of turkey/chicken inside)



Visit [www.accu-chek.co.za](http://www.accu-chek.co.za) to find more healthy recipes that are suitable for people with diabetes.

## Staying Active

Children with diabetes who exercise get the same benefits as adults<sup>10</sup>. It helps keep their blood glucose levels down, keeps their heart and other muscles healthy and it does wonders for their emotional health and confidence<sup>10</sup>. If your child doesn't like sports, don't worry. Here are some great ways to get them off the couch.

-  **Hula hoops:** They're inexpensive, and with about 10 minutes of practice, your kids will be hooked.
-  **Follow the leader.** Remember this one? The leader runs (or crawls or skips or gallops or dances) around while everyone else follows and copies them. Take turns being the leader for 3 minutes at a time.
-  **Play catch.** Baseballs and playground balls are fun, but you can also try throwing and catching water balloons, an inflatable workout ball or even a big, stuffed animal. If your kids are rolling their eyes, why not stir things up and challenge them to an egg toss...with a raw egg!
-  **Hopscotch.** Draw a 10-square hopscotch board on the ground with some sidewalk chalk and get hopping. Try making it tricky by drawing larger or smaller squares, or even mixing up the sizes.

 **Water-balloon tag.** What could be more fun than throwing water balloons at each other on a hot day? Each person starts with five balloons. The first one to tag others with all of their balloons wins. Or the wettest one loses. Or the driest one wins.

 **Just walk.** Take a family walk around your neighbourhood after dinner. If the weather isn't cooperating, try some of these stuck-inside ideas instead.

 **Balloon volleyball.** See how long everyone can keep a balloon from touching the furniture or floor. Too easy? Add a few more and keep them all in the air!

 **Freeze dance.** Dance like crazy until the DJ stops the music, and then freeze in place. Make sure you all laugh at each other's silly poses. Take turns being the DJ.

**Whatever activity or sport your son or daughter chooses, here are a few smart habits for them to put into practice:**

 **Check your blood glucose before exercising<sup>11</sup>.** If your child's blood glucose is low, he or she will need a snack before exercising. If it is really low, your child should treat the low blood glucose, have an additional snack and wait until he or she feels better before exercising. If it is high, a check for ketones may be needed. If ketones are moderate or high, it is a bad time to exercise. Stop and deal with this issue instead.

 **Check your blood glucose while exercising<sup>11</sup>.** If exercise is vigorous or continues for an extended period of time—like a soccer game or dance class—it is recommended that your child check his or her blood glucose every 30 minutes. Having an extra snack on hand is a good idea too.

 **Drink plenty of water<sup>11</sup>.** Avoiding dehydration, which can get in the way of thinking clearly and performing at his or her best, is something your child can do with little effort.

**Wear a medical ID.** You won't always be there, and a medical ID bracelet or tag can help explain to others that your child has diabetes and may need immediate medical attention.



## What about when my child goes to school:



Starting school is an exciting time for many children as they embrace a new world of friends, textbooks, stationery, uniforms and teachers. For kids with diabetes and their parents, these typical school preparations are just the beginning. Studies show that parents report significant worry about their child attending school or daycare specifically in relation to the school's ability to appropriately manage T1D<sup>1</sup>.

Make sure that on diagnosis you meet with your child's diabetes care educator and the school staff so that you are 100% comfortable that they can assist your child should he or she need it.

Below are some helpful tips that you can use to make sure your child stays safe and happy at school:

### **Have a Diabetes Management Plan<sup>12</sup>**

Work with your diabetes care educator or health care provider to create a plan that spells out your child's diabetes care regimen, if you haven't already. Be sure to include things like:

- What are the child's typical symptoms of hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose) and hyperglycaemia (high blood glucose)? Include the symptoms of each and the consequences of your child's blood glucose going too low or too high.
- If your child does go into a hypoglycaemic state, how should it be treated? Detail various options and quantities that should be consumed of carbohydrate rich foods like glucose tablets, fruit juices and glucagon injections. Give examples of specific snacks that your child may have to treat low blood glucose and be sure to state whether or not your child can inject themselves with insulin or if this should be administered by an adult.
- Finally meet with the school – it is helpful to meet with the principal, your child's teacher and the school nurse to discuss and review the plan and ensure all are comfortable should it need to be implemented.





## **Build Up Your Child's Confidence and Transition the Self-Care<sup>7</sup>**

As they grow, kids will probably get better at recognising the signs of low blood glucose and, by 8 or 10, they may be able to monitor their own blood glucose levels<sup>7</sup>. They can also start weighing in on healthy food choices. They may be able to give an injection, although they may not be able to draw up insulin until they're 10 or 11 years old<sup>7</sup>.

Someday, all diabetes self-care responsibilities will be in your child's hands. Helping them learn how to manage their blood glucose in positive, effective ways is a great gift you can give them.





## Remember: It Takes a Village

The African proverb of “It takes a village to raise a child” has never been more true than for that of a parent with a child who has diabetes. A great way to create and build your own village is to join some of the support groups that are available online. It is amazing to see the outpouring of support and love that is given especially to parents of children who are newly diagnosed.

Being around or in contact with people who are experiencing the same challenges as you are can often be a source of comfort especially if they have overcome these challenges and can offer some advice or recommendations. Sometimes, you might just need a moment to vent to someone who understands and community support groups are an excellent platform to facilitate this. Here are some great Facebook Groups you can join:



**Kids Powered by Insulin:** A support group for parents with kids with T1D. Here we are one big family. We laugh, vent & cry together, but most of all, we are here for each other! We believe in positive T1D parenting.



**Youth With Diabetes (YWD):** A non-profit organisation created to help kids, teens and young adults living with diabetes. Run by teens who have diabetes themselves.



**Diabetes South Africa:** A non-profit organisation providing education, literature, counselling, and face-to-face support groups.



**AccuChekSubSahara:** Join the Accu-Chek Facebook community of over 180 000 people and get practical tips for diabetes management, access to healthy recipes and much more.



**Remember!** If you are looking for medical advice always consult with your Health Care Professional before making any adjustments to your child's treatment regimen.

Finally moms and dads, we wish you well on this journey and would like to leave you with the following beautiful quote:

*Parents, YOU were given these children – you. No one else. YOU were given these children because YOU are who they need. You have the heart that loves them, even on the hardest of days. You have the determination to give them everything they need. You have the strength to wake up every morning and do it all again even when you're exhausted. You have the smile they crave and the touch that will make everything OK. You are their sunshine and their comfort. On the days that you question yourself, remember that. You got this.*





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