Counterbalance
For Parents of Children with Diabetes

Taking Care of Yourself

When you signed on for parenthood, most likely you knew it was going to demand much of your time and energy. You probably never imagined constant glucose testing, giving injections, changing pump sites, or learning the number of carbohydrates in foods. But there it is—diabetes. Yet here you are adjusting your life to make your child’s life with diabetes easier. It’s what a parent does.

Diabetes never goes away. It is not like a phase or an illness that runs its course. It is different from the other daily routines you may develop as your child grows—homework, play dates, soccer, and other activities that can make life challenging. Anyone, even the “super parent,” may burn out on the many emotional and physical demands that diabetes brings to life.

Over time, the routines of testing your child’s blood sugar, administering the correct dose of insulin, ensuring the appropriate amounts of food are consumed, and emergency foods are available in case of low blood sugar, might feel like a burden.

Caregiver burnout is not inevitable. If you take steps to prevent burnout, you not only help your child, but in turn help yourself. Here are three of the most common signs:

• Negative feelings toward your child or spouse.

You love your child and are willing to do whatever it takes to help them live a full and happy life. However, if you do not acknowledge your own needs and feelings, it can lead to resenting your child or your spouse. And in turn, you may feel guilty about feeling resentment.

• Social isolation

Time with others can be impacted by the care you provide for your child. You may begin to feel alone on this journey of parenting and diabetes, and think no one understands what it is like. When we feel overwhelmed, discouraged or hopeless, the tendency is to pull away from those closest to us. This can lead to depression and more social isolation.

• Neglecting self-care

Parenting requires a great deal of your time and energy on a daily basis. Every parent knows there are times that you have to put your own needs and plans on hold, or at least modify them, in order to be there for your child. However, being a responsible parent and ignoring your own needs are two entirely different matters. Ignoring your own needs is a setup for caregiver burnout.
Here are some steps to get you moving in the right direction:

- Acknowledge feelings of resentment, anxiety, depression, or loneliness instead of trying to think that everything is alright. You are human. Distracting yourself or numbing your feelings with food, alcohol, or drugs isn’t healthy.
- Talk about your feelings with a good friend, counselor, or someone you trust. When you keep feelings inside, it may cause more emotional exhaustion and unrealistic thinking. Externalizing your feelings by talking about them helps you make sense of them.
- Identify your biggest needs, and find solutions to have those needs met. For example, you may need help on a regular basis with your child’s diabetes tasks. Ask a family member, spouse, friend, or neighbor with medical training to help you.

Diabetes camps
Check out these websites to find a camp near you.
- childrenwithdiabetes.com/camps

Oregon
- chrisdudley.org/?q=camps-for-diabetes
- galescreekcamp.org

Idaho
- hodia.org
- hdiabetescenter.com/category/special-events

Washington
- campleo.org

Now is the time to plan for diabetes summer camp for your child. Most programs have scholarships and camp availability to kids with diabetes that can’t pay to attend.

If you have not had a child attend diabetes camp, you can find out more about them at the following websites:

Summer Camp!
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Living with Diabetes 24/7
By Sheila Spear, RN
Recently, I totaled the time I spend in a typical day taking care of my diabetes, and was surprised by the result.
I test about nine times a day. I can whip out my meter, prick my finger, and have my blood sugar result in less than one minute. (It takes longer to find my meter—why do they always make them black?) That’s nine minutes. Let’s round it up to ten.
Counting my carbs takes about 30 seconds per snack/meal. If I do that six times per day, that will be three minutes. Let’s round that up to five.
To push a button to deliver my insulin takes about 30 seconds. Once again, 30 seconds times six, will be three minutes. Round up again to five.

10 + 5 + 5 = 20.
That added up to only 20 minutes a day doing diabetes stuff. It certainly feels like it’s a lot more time!
During a recent type 1 diabetes workshop I attended, we discussed how many tasks a person with diabetes does each day. I came up with the following list for myself:
1. Check blood sugar.
2. Count carbs.
3. Determine what’s in a food. Is it high fat or protein?
4. Insulin on board: Have I taken my insulin? How much? How long will it last?
5. Exercise: Any physical activity coming up or just finished?
7. Feelings check-in: Am I upset about something? Would that affect my blood sugar?
8. Take insulin.
10. Problem solve high and low blood sugar.

11. Check supplies: Do I have my meter, enough test strips, and food/candy with me?
12. Prescriptions: Am I running low on supplies at home?
13. Social activities: Where will I be and what will I be doing? What supplies will I need and how much?

Wow! I didn’t know I did so many different things to take care of myself until I saw this list.

What do you do every day to take care of yourself? All of the above or more? I think we can both add one more thing—we can pat ourselves on the back and remember to also thank the people in our lives who help us.

Keep up the good work!

Ask Sheila

Question: I have had type 1 diabetes for three years. I am 14 years old and just started at a new high school, because my family had to move for my dad’s job. It’s a small town, and it has been hard to start school with kids who don’t know me. The other day, one kid pointed at me and yelled, “Hey, she’s the chick who shoots up!” I was really embarrassed. I have a couple of close friends, but no one really understands diabetes or knows how hard it is. There are times I want to just be normal and not tied to thinking about diabetes all the time. How do I deal with kids at school so I can feel better about being there?

Answer: Start by educating your friends about diabetes. Be open and honest about your diabetes to help people understand. Let them know what kind of support you need and how they can be on your back-up team if you have a “low” at school.
The person who yelled was ignorant and rude. They are the one who should be embarrassed. Tell a teacher, counselor, or administrator if someone at school is really bothering you. Most schools have a zero tolerance for bullying, and that comment was bullying.

Find a support group with other teens who have diabetes. Connect with others on a reliable message board. Connecting online is another way to be part of a community, especially when you have experienced changes and feel isolated in a new place. Here are a few good links to get you started:
Community.diabetes.org/t5/Teens-Young-Adults/bd-p/Teens-and-Young-Adults
Kids.jdrf.org/index.cfm?page_id=110004
Juvenation.org/all_groups/default.aspx
**Staying in the Game**

Are you a “fit” kid? Being fit is a way of saying a person eats well, gets enough physical activity, and is a healthy weight. When you are fit, your body works well, feels good, and you can do all the things you want to do, like play with your friends. Having diabetes makes it even more important to be fit and stay healthy.

Exercise keeps your body fit and is fun! Playing a sport is one way you can exercise and have fun. When you exercise, you will need to keep your blood sugar balanced.

- While you are exercising, your muscles use more sugar from your blood. This means you may need less insulin and more carbohydrates. Eating more food will put back the energy (sugar) your muscles used.

- Eat some extra carbohydrates before or during a game or activity. Carry a snack with you, such as raisins or cheese crackers, to help you stay in the game. Some kids with diabetes carry a water bottle with a mix of a sports drink and water.

- If you exercise hard for 30 minutes or more, you may need to stop and have a snack of carbohydrate and protein, such as peanut butter and crackers. It will help keep your blood sugar from going too low.

**Circle the kinds of exercise you like to do:**

Soccer  Hiking  Softball  
Biking  Football  Gymnastics  
Tennis  Hockey  Skiing  
Track  Walking  
Dance  Running  
Swimming  
Horseback Riding

Write your other favorites here:

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**Summer Exercise Scramble**

Cut out the squares and put them together to unscramble the picture.

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**PB&J Hummus**

You will need:

- A blender or mixer
- ¾ cup canned garbanzo beans (chick peas)
- ¼ cup “natural” peanut butter
- ¼ cup unsweetened apple juice
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ cup blueberry, raspberry, or strawberry 100% fruit spread

**Directions:**

Be sure to check with an adult before you use the blender.

1. Drain the garbanzo beans. Pour them into the blender.
2. Add peanut butter, apple juice, and cinnamon to the blender; scrape down the sides of the blender with a rubber spatula if needed. Cover and blend until smooth.
3. Spoon the bean mixture (hummus) into a bowl, and then spoon a layer of fruit spread over the top.

Try hummus with crackers, graham crackers, banana chunks, or celery sticks.

Nutrition information per 2 tablespoons: 94 calories, 14 grams carbohydrate, 2 grams fiber

Adapted from: *Cooking Up Fun for Kids with Diabetes*. American Diabetes Association.