



10 tips for managing your diabetes

Take your medication

This one is so obvious that I shouldn't have to mention it, but it probably has the biggest impact on any diabetic's life. Insulin – whether in pill form for type 2 diabetics or injections or a pump for type 1 diabetics – is literally life-saving. Take your medication properly, and you can live a long, happy, healthy life with diabetes. Don't take your medication and you can get very ill, very fast.

2. Eat a healthy diet

Again, it's not rocket science, but it is vitally important. People with diabetes don't have to eat a special 'diabetes diet', but they do have to eat the same healthy diet that we should all be eating: little to no fast food, junk food, fizzy drinks, sweets and cakes, lots of fresh vegetables, some fruit, good quality proteins, the right kind of fats and a small amount of wholegrain carbs. We all know that refined carbohydrates like white rice and pasta and doughnuts and cookies are bad for us – as diabetics, it's important to know this and respect it. That's not to say there's no room for treats in life, but I always stick to my mom's advice: "everything in moderation"

3. Exercise regularly

Moderate exercise three times a week is the magic key to a healthy life with diabetes, in my opinion. We can all find half an hour three times a week to go for a walk, or do a yoga class, or jog around the block. And in the long-term, that's going to be much better for your health than one big gym session once a week. Slow and steady, that's my motto!

4. Manage your stress

Stress is bad for all of us, but it's particularly bad for those of us with diabetes, because it releases the hormone cortisol, which inhibits the effects of insulin. You know what that means? High blood sugar, which makes you feel cranky and tired as well as stressed! A bad combination. I find that short meditations (five minutes or less) work wonders for my stress levels.



5. Get enough sleep

Before I had kids, I thought this was a given: you go to bed, you sleep! Now I know it's a lot trickier than that for many people. But it's really important for people with diabetes to get enough sleep. Not only so that they have the energy and mental clarity to deal with life with a chronic illness (on top of everything else), but because while you sleep your body clears cortisol out of the system. We already know that too much cortisol is bad for blood sugar.

6. Go for regular check-ups

I've been diabetic for a decade, and I know a lot about the condition. But I still go to see my endocrinologist (diabetes specialist) three times a year to keep my motivation up. I also see an ophthalmologist once a year to check on my eyes, and I get my kidneys checked every year. This is all covered by my medical aid because I'm a diabetic – check out your PMBs (even on hospital plan) to see what visits you can get for free each year.

7. Be informed

When it comes to diabetes, knowledge really is power. The more you understand the condition, the easier it is to live with – and thrive. Check out www.sweetlifemag.co.za for a daily article on all the different aspects of diabetes (exercise, diet, medication, emotions) and for inspiring stories of people living well with diabetes.

8. Ask for support

No matter how well controlled you are, diabetes is hard. It's relentless and exhausting and constant, and you can't do it alone. Whether you ask for support from your clinic or your doctor or your family or friends (or all of the above), it's important that you don't try to do it alone. Having diabetes is nothing to be ashamed of – hiding it is.

9. Be kind to yourself

Before I was diagnosed, being kind to myself usually meant a bar of chocolate or a slice of cake. These days, it's more like a cup of tea and a quiet half-hour to read my book... Find what it is that refuels you and gives you energy, and do more of that. Try your best to be as well-controlled as possible but don't beat yourself up if your blood sugar goes high or low; it is unfortunately part of daily life. Just do your best and be as kind to yourself as possible.

10. Join a community

This is probably my most important tip: join a community so you don't feel like you're the only person dealing with all the daily irritations of diabetes!

You are not alone in this! We're all in it together.