

## SEX AND DIABETES

### Why in the world do we want to talk about them together?

Sex can be a big deal no matter who you are. For teenagers with diabetes, there are some additional risks and challenges you might not have been taught by your parents or in sex ed. But if you want to, feel ready, and you and your partner can be healthy and have sex if you take a few extra precautions:

- 1) **Talk to your partner about your diabetes.** You might feel uncomfortable or embarrassed at the beginning, but explaining your diabetes is a really important way to keep yourself safe if your sugars get low, can diffuse awkwardness or confusion about your pump or medical alert bracelet, and can make it easier for you to do the things you need to do to like check your sugars or have a snack. Plus, for women with diabetes, it's even more important to make sure you and your partner are on the same page about birth control.
- 2) **Be on top of your diabetes care before, during, and after.** Sex can be like exercise when it comes to T1D – unpredictable. Like any other physical activity, it can cause low bloodsugar levels, but it can also be stressful, which might spike levels. It differs for every person. So it's really important to think carefully, take care of yourself, and be prepared. Keep snacks on hand, test your blood sugar, before you start, and pay attention to how your body feels. Don't be afraid to take a break, check your blood sugar, and have a snack if you need it. And if you wear a pump you might decide to disconnect beforehand, don't forget to reconnect it right after!
- 3) **Use birth control if you aren't trying to get pregnant.** Because of the effect of high blood sugars on the baby (see #4), you need to plan your pregnancies. If you don't want to get pregnant and are at risk (having heterosexual sex), be sure to use birth control! There are many options for birth control, so work with your doctor to choose the one that is right for you.
- 4) **Make sure your blood sugars are in target if you are trying to get pregnant.** If you want to get pregnant, it's really important that your blood sugars are in target (A1c < 7.0). That is because higher A1cs put your baby at **VERY HIGH RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS** (way higher than the rest of the population). The baby is most vulnerable in the **FIRST** weeks of pregnancy...the time when you might not even know that you're pregnant yet. You can have a healthy baby if you have diabetes, but you must **PLAN** your pregnancies to make sure your blood sugars are in range before you get pregnant.

5) **Be aware of negative side effects.** In both men and women, Type 1 Diabetes can cause sexual dysfunction because of how it affects blood flow and blood glucose levels. For guys, that can look like erectile dysfunction (ED), or the inability to get and keep an erection during sex. If this bothers you, you can always talk to your doctor. For girls, it often looks like vaginal dryness, which can make sex difficult, uncomfortable, or painful. Using a water-based lube can help with that. Just be careful—some lubricants are not sugar free and might affect your blood glucose levels, so read the label. And for everyone, diabetes or other conditions like depression and anxiety can affect your sex drive. If that is bothering you, talk to your doctor about what you can do.



**You've probably heard it before: In any sexual relationship, pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or viruses.** Talk with your doctor about preventing STIs and about the best birth control for you.

**Remember:**

If you're planning on being intimate with a partner, talk about whether sex is what you **both** want.

- Talk about sexual history. Have either of you had STIs?
- Do either of you plan on being intimate with anyone else outside the relationship? Be honest.
- How will you prevent STIs?
- In a heterosexual (straight) relationship? Talk about birth control.
- What would you do if birth control didn't work?

**Forgot birth control or the condom breaks?**

Consider emergency contraception ("Morning-after pill," "Plan B"). This is NOT the "abortion pill". It can prevent pregnancy up to 5 days after unprotected sex. More Info? Call Planned Parenthood: 1-800-230-PLAN

**CONTRACEPTION THAT PREVENTS PREGNANCY (OUT OF 100 WOMEN, THIS NUMBER WILL GET PREGNANT)**

- Abstinence (0)
- Implant (1)
- IUD (1)
- Birth control pills (2-9)
- Injection hormones (2-9)
- The "patch" (2-9)
- The "ring" (2-9)
- Condoms (15-24)
- Spermicides (25)

**NOTE: Young women with diabetes should consider the contraception that is most effective.**

**WANT TO PREVENT PREGNANCY AND PROTECT AGAINST STIs???**

**Condom + 1 more form of Birth Control =**



**CONTRACEPTION THAT PREVENTS STIs:**

- Abstinence
- Condoms

**Resources:**

1. Sex and Diabetes (n. date). Barbara Davis Center for Diabetes: University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.
2. Idlebrook C. (2014). 7 Tips to a Better Type 1 Sex Life. Insulin Nation.
3. Sex and Type 1 Diabetes (2015). SexInfo Online.
4. JDRF (2013). Teen Toolkit. JDRF. NewYork: New York.