

Diabetes and Sex

Diabetes brings extra risks and challenges to any sexual relationship — whether you've been in a relationship for a while, or are just starting to think about having sex. Either way, you and your partner can stay healthy and have sex with just a few extra precautions.

Understand sexual dysfunction

Both type 1 and type 2 diabetes can cause sexual dysfunction [dis-FUHNK-shun]. Poor blood glucose control can damage your blood vessels and reduce blood flow to your sexual organs over time. It can also cause hormonal changes.

- **For men**, this can mean erectile dysfunction (ED) or the inability to keep an erection during sex.
- **For women**, this can cause a lack of interest in sex, an inability to become aroused or achieve orgasm, and vaginal dryness — making sex difficult or painful. A lubricant may help, but be sure to choose one that is glucose-free so that it doesn't affect your blood glucose levels.

If you are having any issues with your sexual health, talk with your healthcare provider.

Tell your partner about your diabetes

You might feel uncomfortable or embarrassed at first, but explaining your diabetes is the best way to be safe. Your partner needs to know:

- The signs and symptoms of low blood glucose
- Why you have a pump or CGM
- Why you wear a medical alert bracelet
- Why you check your blood glucose or need snacks

In addition, if you are a woman with diabetes who is in a heterosexual (male/female) relationship, make sure you and your partner are on the same page about birth control.



Talk it out

If you and your partner are thinking about having sex, talk about:

- **What you both want out of the relationship.** Be honest with yourself and your partner.
- **Your sexual health history.** Have either of you had an STI (sexually transmitted infection)? How will you avoid STIs?
- **Your choice for birth control** (if there's any chance you or your partner could become pregnant).
- **How you will deal with a pregnancy** (in case birth control doesn't work).

Check your blood glucose often

Sex is like any other exercise — it can make your glucose levels unpredictable. During and after sex, your blood glucose levels can drop suddenly, or spike if it's stressful. Everyone reacts differently, so it's really important to take a little extra time to be prepared:

- Keep snacks on hand
- Test your blood glucose before you start
- Pay attention to how your body feels

Don't be afraid to take a break, check your blood glucose, and have a snack if you need it. And if you wear a pump and disconnect it beforehand, don't forget to reconnect it right after!

Prevent STIs

STIs are all too common and have very serious consequences. Consider these steps to prevent STIs:

- **Don't have sex (abstinence).** This includes any sexual contact. Avoiding sexual contact is the most effective way to prevent infection and pregnancy.
- **Use condoms.** The latex condoms for men provide a protective barrier that can help prevent the spread of most STIs. Use them anytime you have sexual contact.
- **Limit your sexual partners.** Having fewer sex partners, or agreeing to be with only one sex partner may keep you from getting an STI. However, you and your partner should both be tested and share your test results with each other before having sex.
- **Get vaccinated.** Vaccines are recommended to protect pre-teens, teens, and young adults (under 26) from some of the most common types of HPV (human papillomavirus). HPV is a known cause of cancers of the cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, anus, throat, tongue, and tonsils.

Birth control and family planning

High blood glucose can cause problems for the baby in the earliest stages of pregnancy, so it's important to plan your pregnancies.

In a heterosexual relationship, there is ALWAYS a chance that you can become pregnant. That's why you need to use birth control EVERY TIME you have sex (unless you're trying to get pregnant). There are many birth control options, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Emergency birth control

If you forget to use your birth control, or your condom breaks, consider using a "morning-after pill." (This is NOT the "abortion pill.") Some brands can prevent pregnancy for up to 5 days after having unprotected sex. You can find them in the family planning area of most retail stores or pharmacies. (You may have to ask for them if they are behind the counter.) You can get it at any age without a prescription or ID.

When you're ready for pregnancy

You can have a healthy baby if you have diabetes, but you must plan your pregnancies to make sure your blood glucose levels are in range (A1C less than 6.5%) before you get pregnant. Here's why:

- High A1Cs put your baby at very high risk for birth defects — much higher than the rest of the population.
- Your baby is most at risk in the first 2 to 4 weeks of pregnancy — the time when you might not even know that you're pregnant yet.