

INFORMATION

FOR PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

MANAGING DIABETES AT COLLEGE

When a student goes off to college, it's an emotional time for parents, who worry that their child will succeed socially and academically. That anxiety is compounded when the student has a chronic disease such as diabetes.

Part of the transition to adulthood is learning to advocate for oneself – and students with diabetes must learn to be assertive about their health and advocate for themselves at college.

The five tips below will help your student better manage their diabetes while at college.

1. Upon arrival on campus, contact Student Health and Disability Services.

If the student has a diabetes-related problem (even one as small as having to miss a quiz), Disability Services will help. Having diabetes also entitles the student to certain accommodations, such as on-campus housing, early class registration to ensure optimal schedule, breaks for self-care during class and exams, and the option to retake a test or homework assignment that was completed while experiencing high or low blood sugar

Also, be aware of the nearest hospital. Find a local pharmacy and notify your doctor of its address and phone number for prescription renewals.

2. Continue the good habit of checking blood sugar before meals and at bedtime.

The change in mealtimes and bedtime and different daily schedules can require adjustment. It's important to check glucose levels and adjust your medication as needed.

3. Make your roommate and the residence advisor (RA) aware of your diabetes.

Explain to your roommates what diabetes is, the signs that indicate low or high blood sugar, and what they should do, if anything. Instruct your roommates to call 911 in the unlikely event that you pass out. Wear a medical alert bracelet.



4. Meet with your medical team before leaving for college.

Your medical team wants you to be successful. Let them know you're going away. Keep a card with their phone numbers on it and don't be afraid to call.

5. Bring your supplies.

Ordering supplies once a month may have worked when you were at home, but at college you will need enough supplies to get you through until you return home for breaks. It's a good idea to bring a 90-day supply. It's safer to have more than you need, rather than not enough. Make sure to bring test strips, monitors, and all the supplies you need. Also bring ready sources of glucose and your health insurance card.

Food and drink considerations for college students

Eating in the dining hall

College food poses challenges for everyone. Think about the notorious “Freshman 15” – the 15 pounds that people tend to gain their first year at college because of the unlimited quantities available on many meal plans and the abundance of desserts and other carbs. Everyone who wants to maintain a good weight and good health at college needs to watch what they eat. Of course, this is even more important for people with diabetes. Here are a few suggestions when eating in the dining hall:

- Fill your plate with as many fruits and veggies as possible and some lean protein when you're at the dining hall and try to stay away from extremely carb-heavy items like pasta and desserts.
- When you eat carbs, select foods for which you know the carb count or can look it up, such as a slice of whole wheat bread, a cup of brown rice, a baked potato, or a fruit.
- Try sticking to a routine when possible.

If you are unsatisfied with the options in the dining hall or you want access to nutritional information, try contacting the director of dining services or a similar staff member. Many schools are happy to accommodate student requests – and they won't know what you need if you don't ask.

If there aren't many diabetes-friendly options in your dining hall, ask if more can be implemented (whole wheat and whole grains vs. white-flour based foods, fresh vegetables and fruit, other low-carb and sugar-free options).

Keep prepackaged snacks in your dorm room for later, such as granola bars, nuts, yogurt, and oatmeal.

For more information

You can get a lot more college tips online, and you can learn from other people with diabetes you know who have gone away to college.

By being prepared and having a plan, students with diabetes can have an easy transition to college and enjoy the experience while staying healthy.

Sources:
<http://newsroom.cumc.columbia.edu/blog/2013/08/23/going-off-to-college-with-diabetes/>
<http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/26/9/2675>
<https://collegediabetesnetwork.org/content/looking-schools>
<https://collegediabetesnetwork.org/content/dining-hall-eating>
<https://beyonddiabetes.org/college-university-with-type-1-diabetes/>

Consuming alcohol

We'd be remiss if we didn't address the elephant in the room: drinking alcohol. While not all college students drink, drinking is prevalent on most college campuses. It's a good idea to talk to your doctor about drinking alcohol before you go away to school. If you have decided that you are going to drink alcohol, there are a few things to be aware of when doing so:

- Always eat before your drink alcohol, and don't consume more than two drinks
- Eat carbs after drinking, as alcohol can lower blood sugar
- Drink alcohol only when in good metabolic control
- Drink with someone who recognizes and knows how to treat hypoglycemia, an extremely dangerous alcohol-related condition

If a person with diabetes is drunk, it might be harder to tell if their blood sugar is low or high, so they should monitor it closely.



Remember to count the grams of carbohydrate in alcoholic beverages and mixers you consume. The result may surprise you!