



😊 Children with Diabetes®

When Your Child Gets Diabetes

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One of the biggest decisions in a person's life is whether or when to become a parent. If you decide to become a parent, one of the things you wish for is a healthy, happy child. Sometimes, your child is healthy for most of their life aside from the normal colds, flus, and now COVID-19. But sometimes your child gets diagnosed with a chronic illness like type 1 diabetes, and it turns your whole life upside down.

Where Do You Start?

There are many important basic skills that should be top priority to learn within the first week of diagnosis. These are many of the things you'll learn at the hospital or clinic where you are diagnosed such as checking blood glucose, monitoring for signs or symptoms of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), and how to give insulin injections. It's important to have a good grasp on the survival skills that will get you through the first couple of months.

In addition to the diabetes tasks, it's important to allow yourself to cope with the diagnosis. It's a major life event that most never forget, and allowing yourself, your child, your other children if you have them, and any other caregivers of the child to feel the emotions about the diagnosis can help everyone's experience. It's also very common for parents to feel guilt or even blame themselves for their child's diagnosis, especially when recently diagnosed.¹ Knowing that this is common and working through your feelings about diagnosis can help improve your own mental health, as well as the mental health of your child with diabetes.

Why Does My Mental Health Matter – Shouldn't I be More Worried About my Child?

You matter, too, caregivers! It's important to take care of yourself – otherwise you won't be able to take care of anyone else. And it turns out that when parents of kids with type 1 diabetes are depressed, they are more likely to have anxiety related to hypoglycemia.² As with other fears, parents can pass on their fear of hypoglycemia, which can lead to the child with diabetes avoiding hypoglycemia and keeping blood sugars at higher levels.

Additionally, if there is a high level of diabetes-related family conflict, meaning a lot of fighting in the house about diabetes, it's more likely that parents will stop caring for diabetes and that glycemic levels will rise.³ Not that you needed any of these additional reasons, but just making sure you know that the science shows that mental health of parents or primary caregivers does impact diabetes management.

How to Find Support:

There are many diabetes camps across the United States, and even some internationally, where your child can meet friends who have diabetes. This can be a great opportunity to meet parents who have children with diabetes as well – which is a

double win! You also may want to ask your pediatrician or endocrinologist if there are any local support groups that you can connect with for people with diabetes.

Of course there also are the Friends for Life conferences, where the whole family can come and connect with other families as well as learn from diabetes psychology experts on topics such as Diabetes Burnout, Leveraging Teamwork, and more. Social media can also be a great avenue for connecting with other families living with diabetes. There's also the happen chance encounters of "Diabetes in the Wild" where you see others wearing a diabetes device such as a continuous glucose monitor (CGM) or insulin pump. It's so rewarding to connect with others with diabetes, no matter how you find them. And the research shows that peer support helps improve diabetes outcomes.

Diabetes is a marathon, not a sprint, and sometimes it may take a little time for you and your family to settle into a routine that works for you. It gets easier the more you learn, and to help, here are some other resources:

Additional Resources:

- DiaTribe has a "Newly Diagnosed" article series
- Children with Diabetes' (CWD) New to Type 1 Diabetes?
- Help for Families Newly Diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (including a video)
- Just Diagnosed With Type 1 Diabetes from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
- Diabetes: Dealing with Feelings from Nemours KidsHealth
- CWD Answers – where you can ask any question and it will get answered by a healthcare professional
- Hang in there, and remember, you are not in this alone!

References:

1. **How do parents of children with type 1 diabetes mellitus cope and how does this condition affect caregivers' mental health?**
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0929693X20301081?via%3Dihub>
2. **Depression as a predictor of hypoglycemia worry in parents of youth with recent-onset type 1 diabetes**
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32410305/>
3. **Longitudinal associations between family conflict, parent engagement, and metabolic control in children with recent-onset type 1 diabetes**
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8515442/>

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