

SALUD+HEALTH info

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Caregiving for a love one with diabetes?

Most people with Diabetes, with exception of young children and the elderly, are capable of managing their own care by following the professional care advice on how to keep on control their diabetes, but sometimes, family members find themselves in the position of having to take care of a frail elder relative with advance complications from diabetes, usually Type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes is serious illness and one of the major problem for patients with diabetes is when they are expecting to “feel” something before they do “something” about. Many times blood sugars of 200-300 do not give any symptom but they are the reason why people will have complications later on. This is why is very important the family caregivers for people with diabetes have to be sure to know their love one’s blood sugar levels to avoid the risk of complications since the people with diabetes are at risk serious of fatal events such as amputations, blindness, heart attacks and comas.



If one of your loved ones now needs you for helping with his or her life, you will need to keep this information and follow up to make easier your work as his or her family caregiver.

Consult the doctor

If you are uncertain about anything, rather consult the doctor than make any decisions yourself that you might regret later. If anything untoward happens, rather err on the side of caution. Schedule regular doctor’s visits.

In the fight against diabetes, knowledge really is power, especially on the part of caregivers of diabetics with advance complications.

Infom Yourself

Knowledge of the condition is crucial, as is the ability to recognize symptoms of hyperglycemia and the ability to manage the condition as a whole. Regular testing of blood sugar is also essential, especially if you are not sure whether someone is hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) or hyperglycemic (high blood sugar). The blood glucose level would also determine medication, level of exercise, diet for the day and the possible risks or complications ahead.

Know the symptoms of hyperglycemia. Symptoms of high blood sugar are reasonably easy to recognize. These include rapid breathing, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, stomach pain and confusion. In emergencies, these could even include becoming comatose.

Look for help

Never underestimate the value of other peoples' support. The Support groups are important for both, for you and the person for whom you are caring. By assisting a support group you will have contact with others in the same situation. In San Diego we have different organizations, programs and support groups made for Diabetics and their families in our local hospitals.

Plan ahead to be prepared

- With the meals- Read the labels when choosing foodstuffs for diabetics, all caregivers should become hyper vigilant with regards to the contents of especially prepackaged foods. Often hidden sugar and fat lurk in these foods. It is much better to prepare fresh food from scratch, as you can then know exactly what goes into it.

Care for you by helping yourself

- You need to take care of you and take some time out. As in the case of all caregivers, it is important that caregivers should look after themselves in order to avoid burnout. Time out is important, as is exercise, and a healthy social life. One cannot constantly give without receiving.
- Don't get into a power struggle. Who ever you are caring for must know that ultimately their condition is their own responsibility. If you do take full responsibility for the treatment, things could easily develop into a power struggle, where lack of compliance with medication or unwillingness to stick to the diet, becomes a weapon with which to get at you.

Watching out for diabetic complications

This mostly applies to caregivers of elderly diabetics. Signs to look out for are skin infections, abrasions or ulcers, especially on the feet, any signs of bad circulation, such as complaints about pins and needles in the lower legs and feet, complaints about blurred vision, which could point to retinopathy and frequent urination, bladder infections or kidney pain, which signify potential damage to the kidneys.



EMERGENCY

The diabetic comas have a 40 % of mortality rate

All caregivers of diabetic patients should be able to recognise the signs of hyperglycaemia and hypoglycemia. Diabetic comas can be fatal and all caregivers. Get the person to a hospital immediately as this could be potentially life-threatening condition.

If you are unsure whether a person is hyper – or hypoglycemic, give them a **NO** sugary drink to correct the dehydration, improve blood pressure, urine output, and poor circulation, and go to the emergency room immediately or **CALL 911**.

There are two types of crises diabetics could have, both of which can result in a coma if no action is taken. The one is hyperglycemia (high blood sugar) and the other hypoglycemia (low blood sugar).

Hyperglycemia

Rapid, heavy breathing, vomiting, drowsiness, abdominal pain, sweet-smelling breath, frequent urination and in severe cases, unconsciousness.

If the person having these symptoms is conscious and is able to swallow, give him/her something to drink that contains no sugar in order to prevent dehydration. Take him to hospital immediately. If this is impossible, **CALL 911**.

Unconsciousness or inability to swallow may occur if the person's blood sugar levels are very low. This is called insulin shock, and emergency medical treatment is needed immediately.

Hypoglycemia

Excessive hunger, disorientation, aggressive behavior, pale, clammy skin and possible unconsciousness. This condition occurs when insulin levels become too high, thereby reducing the blood glucose levels severely.

If this person is still conscious, it is a good idea to give him something to swallow that contains sugar. Fruit juice is especially good for this, as is a soda drink.