

ASK EXPERT: Adolescent children and type 1 diabetes



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Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disorder which mostly happens in children and adolescents. It is a life-long condition where beta cells of pancreas responsible for producing insulin, the hormone required to convert food into energy stop producing insulin.

Adolescence – a unique stage of life

Adolescence is the transitional stage of physical and psychological growth of the child. At this stage, child attains some independence and responsibility, begins to have awareness of the future and wants to take his/her own decisions. Usually it is a stressful time for both children and their parents. Independence, self esteem and perspectives about the future are key concerns for both adolescents and parents.

Management of type 1 diabetes during adolescence

Diabetes is difficult; adolescents with type 1 diabetes find it even more difficult. This is partly because of biological changes (growth hormone) and partly because of developmental transition and psycho social factors. Self-care is the key to the development of a child's independence and self-esteem. At the same time, parent's supervision needs to continue.

Challenges faced by adolescents

Adolescents with diabetes carry extra burden of managing diabetes and this can have impact on both their life and diabetes management.



- **Poor blood sugar control** - One of the most frustrating and persistent problems during adolescence is the inability to control blood sugar. Physiological changes like spurts of growth hormone, acts as an anti-insulin agent. Release of adrenaline and other hormones, which triggers the release of stored glucose results in blood sugar levels that swing from too low to too high.
- **Poor self acceptance** - a person needs to accept his or her own body. Adolescents with diabetes feel that they are different, their dependency on medication and fluctuating blood glucose levels make them feel sickly. Apprehension regarding peer acceptance and by opposite sex is quite common.
- **Poor growth opportunity** - Adolescent with diabetes due to their continuous dependence of medications and various restrictions may think that they will not be able to pursue the careers of their choice and live life like others

Along with this, one of most important challenge as the parent of a child with type 1 diabetes is to decide how much to control and protect.

Tips for helping Teens with diabetes

It is important that your teenager understands the dynamics of diabetes as early as possible. You can help to become independent and still maintain good blood glucose control by.

- T** - Trusting the ability of child but still observing
- E** - Engaging in education and responsibilities about life and diabetes
- E** - Enabling mutually acceptable decisions
- N** - Need to limit control and identify individual requirements
- S** - Scary thoughts and social comments to be addressed

It is very important that parents treat the child like their friend not as ward especially during adolescent period. Assure your child that you're open to hearing any ideas and complaints. React calmly in adverse situations. Mistakes will happen from you as well as your child. Blood glucose levels aren't always controllable but the goal is to keep them as close to the target range while adjusting for life as it happens.

Get involved in support groups and type 1 diabetes organizations. Your child will benefit from being around other young people with type 1 diabetes, and you will benefit from sharing information and insights with other parents who know the pitfalls, frustrations, and anxieties of a life with type 1 diabetes. Another very important thing for parents is to seek professional help. If they believe their child is in serious trouble.

Ultimate goal for treatment

Ultimate goal of treatment is that diabetes is well controlled and children with type 1 diabetes grow into independent adults. Another goal is that every adolescent should have normal timing and magnitude of the pubertal growth spurt. Last but not least that every child and adolescent with diabetes should have positive self esteem.

Current Indian Scenario

Diagnosis of diabetes has a huge impact on both the child and the family. It is estimated that there are more than 75000 children living with diabetes in India. The impact of diabetes is very huge especially, when it strikes in childhood or adolescence. Adequate management of type 1 diabetes requires an ecosystem of support which includes healthcare professionals, medication and monitoring, diabetes education, counselling and support from society and family. Healthcare, in India, is primarily financed through out-of-pocket payments by households. Basic diabetes treatment sometimes seems to be out of reach for many people belonging to under privileged class; so education and support system seems out of question, as a result many children either lose their lives or suffer from early appearance of many complications of diabetes.

Changing Diabetes in Children (CDiC) program

Novo Nordisk Education Foundation along with 21 specialized centres across India has tried to address critical gap in the management of type 1 diabetes through its CDiC program. More than 4000 children have been registered in the program and are provided with comprehensive care which includes free human insulin and glucose monitoring. Education of adolescents and their families is essential so they can understand what diabetes is and live a healthy and full life. Apart from the primary objectives of improving access to essential care, the program incorporates education and counselling about diabetes and its management. We have more than 10 education literature exclusively for adolescents which includes Mishti – the story of girl with diabetes. For imparting self-management education Diabetes education camps are conducted. More than 250 diabetes education camps have been held so far in partnership with the CDiC centres. The camp setting is an ideal place for providing diabetes education, parent counselling, providing peer support and thus empowering children and families to manage diabetes.

If you would like to have more information on type 1 diabetes you can write to us at-

Diabetes Educator

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