

# ASK EXPERT:

## Type 1 diabetes in children - A long story of motivation and discipline



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Type 1 diabetes is one of the chronic diseases which happen in children and adolescents. It is a lifetime disorder for which there is no vacation. Like all chronic and progressive problems, diabetes has physical, psychological, emotional, and social dimensions that demand attention.

### Multiple components of care

Managing type 1 diabetes, not only requires insulin for the entire life, but also right nutrition, exercise, proper blood glucose monitoring and stress management. Never ending tasks, ongoing progression of diabetes and complications comes with its moments of frustration and even depression. Out of multiple aspects; let's try to understand a few.

**Taking insulin** - When a person is diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, it means that there is requirement of taking insulin for survival. According to need, multiple daily injections need to be administered and it is dangerous to skip even a single shot. Child and the family need to work closely with healthcare team to determine which insulin or insulins are best for them.

**Nutrition** - Nutrition is one of the most important components of the diabetes management. To keep blood glucose levels in normal range, it is very important to understand how different foods affect blood glucose levels and how to adjust the particular food in meal plan. It requires learning as well as motivation to have any kind of food in moderation.

**Exercise** - Exercise and being active are also key components for proper diabetes care.

Although essential, exercise can affect blood glucose levels in many ways as too much exercise can result in low blood glucose levels and no exercise and certain kind of anaerobic exercises can result in high blood glucose levels.

**Monitoring** - To know whether insulin is appropriate according to nutrition, exercise and environment, it is essential to monitor blood glucose on multiple times on a daily basis.

**Stress** - Any kind of physical and mental stress like sickness, adverse psychosocial environment can affect people with diabetes in multiple ways.

**Education** - Diabetes Education requires time and patience. Child and the family not only needs to learn how to take insulin or monitor but also how to manage diabetes during various phases of life - in school, during traveling, while attending a birthday party, during exams, during vacation, etc.

The fact remains that living with type 1 diabetes although tough, is manageable. **With proper care these children can live long and healthy lives.**

### Continuous journey of type 1 diabetes care made easy

Continuous journey of type 1 diabetes care can be made easy by one thought - child is first a child and then a child with diabetes. Key strategies which can help to keep child or anyone motivated are.

- Not to set too hard or unrealistic goals.
- Talk about opportunities and achievements not fear.
- Scare tactics about future complications are not effective. Praise, support, and acceptance are much better motivators.
- There must be more to life than having and managing my diabetes. Every child should have a dream to follow.
- Emotional support plays a key role in diabetes care. Connecting with other people living with diabetes that understand the daily grind of various highs and lows (both physical and emotional) of life with diabetes can make all the difference

- Be patient with the child and with yourself instead of labelling the child or yourself as unfortunate or looser.
- It is always great to involve siblings and other family members in the diabetes management process to keep motivated.

Remember, children with type 1 diabetes require different strategies at different stages of life like infants and toddlers (where the glycaemic goals are slightly high), school going child and adolescents (who require flexibility but strict control of blood glucose). Knowledge about diabetes management, long-term perspectives and plans must be discussed from time to time to keep the person motivated in their current circumstances.

### Ultimate goal for treatment

The ultimate goal of treatment is to keep blood glucose levels near normal at most of the times to prevent both short and long term complications. Appropriate and timely care includes injecting insulin, life style changes and paying attention to the emotional, social and behavioural components which results in motivated people with diabetes. These children can ultimately become highly competent in managing their diabetes by experimenting, practising and developing the skills they need to solve the sea of problems diabetes presents every single day. **D of Diabetes can surely be managed by D of Discipline.**

### Current Indian Scenario

Adequate management of type 1 diabetes requires an ecosystem of support which includes healthcare professionals, medication and monitoring, diabetes education and support from society and family. There are multiple unmet needs with regards to diabetes management and education due to lack of trained health educators. Even physicians face a huge physical burden of treating many patients in a busy OPD, resulting in less time spent on education.

### Changing Diabetes in Children (CDiC) program

Novo Nordisk Education Foundation along with 21 specialized centres across India has tried to address the critical gap in the management of type 1 Diabetes through its CDiC program. More than 4000 children registered in the program are provided with comprehensive care which includes free human insulin, glucose monitoring and all essential diagnostic tests. Apart from the primary objectives of improving access to essential care, the program incorporates education and counselling about diabetes and its management for children, their parents and health care professionals.

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

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