

# Teenagers & Type 1 Diabetes

## The psychological and physical challenges



**Adolescence is a tough time for all kids and their parents.**

**Teenagers with diabetes carry extra burdens. That child who was always so good about type 1 diabetes management may suddenly rebel against the routine.**

**He or she may refuse to monitor blood sugar levels, go on food binges, be evasive about test results. Your teenager may be grumpy, angry, distant.**

### **The Psychological Challenges: Sexual Identity, Independence, Self-Care**

Sexual identity and independence are challenges for many teens and their parents. For teenagers with diabetes, they present some special issues. The demands of self-care also can create unique pressures. To develop a sexual identity, a person has to accept his or her own body. While this is difficult for all teenagers, type 1 diabetes makes it even harder. After all, successful people in movies and on TV are shown as young, beautiful, and physically perfect. Teenagers with diabetes know they are not perfect. They wonder if they'll be accepted by the opposite sex and by their peers.

Sometimes, fear of rejection will cause them to isolate themselves from their peer group. But isolation is even worse for self-esteem. If this happens to your child, you should try to break this potentially damaging cycle.

To achieve independence, teenagers often form bonds with their friends. But peer groups require conformity, and conformity creates conflict for teenagers with type 1 diabetes. How can they act just like their friends and still keep control of their type 1 diabetes? Helping your child feel comfortable with the boundaries of his or her diabetes management program can be a positive step in dealing with peer pressure.

Adolescents are expected to become totally self-sufficient in their diabetes routine.

While this self-reliance helps build confidence, for some it creates another kind of pressure and anxiety. When their blood sugar levels go out of control—in spite of their best efforts—they may feel frustrated, weak, and inadequate. They may react in one of two ways: denial of the disease, or with aggressive behaviour, which may be acted out through food binges or skipping their insulin.

It is important that you and your teenager understand the dynamics of blood sugar during the teenage years.

### **The Physical Challenge: Blood Sugar Control**

One of the most frustrating and persistent problems during adolescence is the inability to control blood sugar. Research has shown that physiological changes are at work. It is believed that a hormone called Growth Hormone (GH), which stimulates the growth of bone and muscle mass during puberty, also acts as an anti-insulin agent. Moreover, falling blood sugar stimulates the release of adrenaline, which in turn triggers the release of stored glucose. The result: blood sugar levels that swing from too low to too high.

You and your teenager should both realise that poor blood sugar control is not all his or her fault.



## Tips for Helping Your Teenager

Understanding and recognising the limits of your control are key elements in helping your teenager with Type 1 diabetes work through the challenges of adolescence.

Three areas of special importance are:

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### Understand the Need for Control.

Teens want to be masters of their own lives. They want to define their own identities. To accomplish these objectives, they have to keep testing their limits. You can help show how they can use the discipline and control of diabetes care to gain strength and mastery in other parts of their lives.

By no means do these suggestions mean you should turn your back on your teen and allow him or her to self-destruct. You can talk with your teen about the choices he or she is making. Talk about grown-up matters, like career, marriage, and alcohol. Talking with your teenager shows you think of him or her as an adult and helps keep the lines of communication open during this difficult period.

Get your teen involved in type 1 diabetes support groups and diabetes camps, where he or she can meet other teens with type 1 diabetes. If you believe your child is in serious trouble, don't be embarrassed about seeking professional help.

## Parents and Type 1 Diabetes

Your child isn't the only one struggling with the emotional challenge that diabetes presents. You are too, and you need support—because it will help you and because it will help your child.

You're not alone in your struggle, and there's no reason to feel alone. Get involved in support groups and type 1 diabetes organisations. 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.

Source:

<http://jdrf.org/life-with-t1d/type-1-diabetes-information/control-and-management/helping-your-child-or-teen-live-with-type-1-diabetes/>

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### Understand the Need for Spontaneity.

Teens want to be spontaneous—to be able to do things, eat things, try things. type 1 diabetes requires the opposite. A teen with type 1 diabetes must realise that freedom only comes with knowledge and responsibility. Only by fully understanding and controlling his or her diabetes can a teen achieve the flexibility he or she craves.

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### Recognise the Limits of Your Control.

Be realistic. Accept the fact that you can't watch over your teen every minute of the day. You, too, have to learn that it's your child's type 1 diabetes, not yours.