

Are you Going to Let your Diabetes Run your Life?

Susan J. Smith, PhD, CDE
Visalia Medical Clinic

Do you ever feel like your diabetes is the center of your life and dictates your daily schedule? Are you constantly wishing you didn't have diabetes? Just because you feel fine, do you think your diabetes is harmless? Don't ignore your diabetes or it will lead you to a long, unhealthy life.

The only way you know if you are in control of your diabetes is by testing your blood sugar and knowing what those numbers mean.

Your A1C (the 3 month average of your blood sugars) is merely a report card, letting you know if you are doing better, the same or worse than the previous 3 months. But it doesn't tell us how high and low your sugars have been and how erratic your sugars have been. It doesn't tell us if you are having low blood sugars that are very dangerous to the body.

The best tool to completely understand blood sugar fluctuations and discrepancy is continuous glucose monitoring. This is a small device that is attached by a small Teflon needle that reads blood sugars every 5-10 minutes. Your health care practitioner can download the data to a computer and show a graph of a 24 hour period over several days or weeks. This is a "must-have" tool for Type 1 diabetics who rely on their blood sugars to determine their insulin doses. Type 2 diabetics on multiple doses of insulin can also benefit greatly from using a continuous glucose monitor device either several times a year or on a regular basis, depending on insurance approval.

As a person with diabetes, you have the opportunity to learn so much more about what is good for your body and what is not as desirable, whether it be food, exercise or medication. The blood glucose meters only work on people with diabetes (pre-diabetes included). So people with diabetes are a special group, whose pancreas usually don't work at 100%, and are influenced by food intake, exercise, stress and medications. Blood sugars should in most people stay between 80-140 mg/dl all the time. Learning how to interpret your numbers sometimes can take a few educational sessions regularly over time. Check in regularly with your health care provider whether you are feeling good or poorly to be sure the diabetes is under control.

Your blood sugar numbers aren't only helpful to the patients, but your health care provider can use those numbers to determine the effectiveness of your medications. Communicate to your provider if you have any side effects or aren't taking the medications as prescribed. Comparing eating habits, exercise consistency, and adherence to your medication prescriptions can require multiple visits with a healthcare professional or diabetes educator to learn what medication or combination of medications will best provide your body with what is lacking.

Diabetes is not a benign disease; it is progressive over time and can negatively impact your life in the future if you are not taking action now to control what you can. As one patient told me, "Taking care of my diabetes is my investment in my retirement". Not only money but good health in retirement are a very important combination in long, healthy quality of life for the future. Invest in understanding your diabetes and take action now to invest in your future.

