

MANAGING STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES

Learning that your child has type 1 diabetes can increase stress, fear and anxiety. Families often report feeling overwhelmed and as though diabetes has taken over their lives. Children will often mirror parent's strategies for coping with and adjusting to life with diabetes. It is important to be thoughtful about how and with whom you share your worries and concerns and to be mindful of the impact your responses to this diagnosis may have on your children.

Over time, families do adjust and find themselves adapting and readapting to diabetes. There are a number of strategies that may be helpful in adjusting to life with diabetes and improving your sense of control and competence in managing this chronic condition. Here are some recommendations that may be helpful.

Allow Yourself Time.

- Overnight you have been asked to become a diabetes expert. It can take time to feel confident about your child's condition.
- Give yourself the freedom to grieve, feel sadness, anger and frustration, knowing this will pass with time, experience and support.

Identify and Utilize a Support Network.

- This may include health care professionals, friends and family. Identify those in your life who are available to reduce stress and can provide you with practical and emotional support.
- Health care professionals are there to help. Do not let a small worry grow into a large problem; ask questions and make sure you are satisfied with the answers.
- Sharing how you feel with a loved one, joining a support group, or attending an education session about diabetes can help put your feelings in perspective and allow you to feel connected and supported.

Practice Self Care.

- In order to be the most effective caregiver for your child you must first take care of your own mental, emotional, and physical health. Use strategies that have worked for you in the past to reduce stress.
- It can be difficult to balance your own needs with the needs of your child, but doing so is an important part of ensuring you have the resources necessary to cope with the challenges you will face.

Celebrate and Have Fun!

- In the beginning, it can seem as though diabetes is the only thing that exists in your life. Therefore, it is all the more important for your family to find ways to have fun!
- Make time to engage as a family in fun activities, enjoy each other's company and try to maintain a regular routine.
- Show by your actions that diabetes is an aspect of your life but not the whole picture.

Think Short-Term.

- You may feel overwhelmed by the changes you need to make in your life, the new self-care skills you have to learn, and the volume of medical information you need to absorb.
- Eventually it will all seem second nature but for now, focus on an immediate goal which will make tasks more manageable and goals feel attainable.

Take Action and Get Involved!

- The key is not to let a diabetes diagnosis become overwhelming. The sooner you take action, the sooner you'll feel in control of diabetes and the sooner your family will adjust.
- Getting involved in the diabetic community may help provide a sense of control and meaningful action. Opportunities for community involvement may include:
 1. Reading about successful people who have diabetes.
 2. Volunteering for the [Canadian Diabetes Association](#) or the [Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation of Canada](#). Helping educate others or raising money to fund research or services for people with diabetes can be empowering and allow you to take meaningful action towards fighting this condition.
 3. Joining a support group. Both the [CDA](#) and the [JDRF](#) have contacts for support groups throughout the province.
 4. Send your child/family to diabetes camp! [Camp Kakhamela](#) and the CDA's other [D-Camps](#) provide a fantastic way for your child to meet other children and teens with diabetes in a medically safe, fun environment! For more information, visit www.dcamp.ca/Summer-Camps/Camp-Kakhamela.aspx.

If you find the level of stress has become unmanageable or you have not been able to process through your feelings, you may require additional support. If you would like further information or assistance regarding a diagnosis of type 1 diabetes, please contact the BCCH Diabetes Program Social Worker at 604-875-2345, local 7091.

See also our handout [Common Reactions to a Diagnosis of Type 1 Diabetes](#).