

Supporting a family Member or Friend with Type 2 diabetes

If you've recently learned that a family member, friend, or loved one has type 2 diabetes, you may be wondering what you can do to help: This hand-out explains what you need to know about type 2 diabetes, and ways that you can offer support to your loved one.

What you need to know about type 2 diabetes:

- Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes. It doesn't go away and is serious.
- Type 2 diabetes often occurs slowly over time.
- Your loved one didn't cause their type 2 diabetes.
- A person with type 2 diabetes has levels of *blood glucose* (or sugar that is in the blood) that are higher than the average person. *Insulin* is hormone in the body that helps to move blood glucose into cells where glucose is stored and used later for energy.
- People with type 2 diabetes have *insulin resistance*: this means the body is not using its own insulin as well as it used to, which causes blood glucose levels to rise.

Here are some things that you can do to support your family member, friend, or loved one.

- Ask: what can I do to help you care for your type 2 diabetes? Asking your loved one what they need can help to avoid making him or her feel like you are "nagging" them. It can also help to make specific suggestions: for example, would it help if I reminded you about visits to your GP, or when to check your blood glucose? Would it help if I made your lunch, or had a family meeting about limiting takeaways?
- Is your friend or loved one nervous about going to their GP or do they have questions about their medications? Going with them to appointments can be a big help. You can also ask any questions you may have about your role in helping your family member or friend to manage their type 2 diabetes: write down questions in advance and take notes at the appointment.
- Healthful eating and being active are two important ways to manage type 2 diabetes. To help support your friend or family member in making healthy lifestyle changes: Look for new recipes to try. If he or she has a favourite dish that's high in fat in calories, check online to see if there is a low-fat or healthier version of the dish.
- Go for a walk or bike ride together, or ask if there is any other activity that they would enjoy.
- Discuss your expectations with your loved one: it is unrealistic to expect that anyone can follow every rule for healthful behaviour. Talk with your friend or family member to find out the most important thing that they can do to manage their type 2 diabetes: take medications at scheduled times? Exercise? Check blood glucose at certain times?
- Be there for your friend or family member: talk with them about how they are feeling and be a good listener.

REFERENCES:

Supporting a Family Member or Friend With Type 2 Diabetes available at www.ndei.org/New/SupportingaFamilyMemberorFriendWithType2Diabetes
ADA; 8 tips for caregivers. Available at: <http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/recently-diagnosed/8-tips-for-caregivers.html>.
DAWN Study (Diabetes Attitudes Wishes and Needs). DAWN2™ study results. Available at: <http://www.dawnstudy.com/dawn2/dawn-2-study-results.asp>