



More wit and wisdom for kids with diabetes
(and their parents)

Friends, Family, & Diabetes How to make the pieces fit

“Why don’t these people just leave me alone?!”

A lot of people with diabetes ask that. After all, it’s tough enough to deal with diabetes. But on top of that, you have to deal with what seems like a lot of dumb questions:

Your parents ask, “Did you test?”

Your grandmother wants to know, “Can you eat that?”

Your friends say, “Doesn’t that shot hurt?!” as they scrunch up their noses.

So, why is everyone asking questions? Why won’t they just leave you alone and let you deal with diabetes on your own?

The answer’s simple: the people asking those questions care about you. Heck, most of them probably even like you – a lot. They may not know everything there is to know about diabetes. But they know they want to do anything they can to help.

Some of the people in your life may know a lot about diabetes. Your parents, for example, who’ve been helping you out since the day you were diagnosed. Others, like some of the kids in your school, know absolutely nothing except that you have to take shots.

Most people are somewhere in between. They may know a little about diabetes. But what they know may be something they heard from someone a long time ago. Their information may be outdated. Or, it may be good information for one person with diabetes but totally wrong for you.

The most important thing to remember is it’s **your** diabetes. You and your health care team get to decide how to manage it. Sometimes that means saying, “Thanks for asking, but I know what I’m doing.” Other times it may mean taking advantage of the help that’s offered, or even asking for help.

Here are a few suggestions on how to turn every one’s interest in your diabetes into support that helps you take control.

How to Deal with Parents

Parents – More than anybody else, these are the people who are going to ask you a million questions about what you did, or didn’t do, or let you know exactly what you should have done.

In a lot of ways, that’s a good thing. Because there is so much to think about and so much to do when you’re

working to keep diabetes controlled that it helps to have another brain or two on your team. And you don't have to admit this to anyone – but some of the things you have to do to control diabetes are pretty “grown up” things. Things you probably don't want to have to think about.

But no matter how much you sometimes appreciate grownups' help, no matter how much they know, no matter how nice they are when they're helping, there will be probably be times when you think your parents are just plain “nagging.”

Why are parents like that, anyway? Part of the reason is that diabetes is almost as frustrating for them as it is for you.

All the tough times you go through, they go through with you. The lows, the highs, the confusion and the frustration. But unlike you, they can't actually do anything about those things themselves. They have to convince you to do what it takes to get and keep control. And the only way they can know if you're doing what it takes is to ask questions. And it might be a lot of questions!

Also, some parents blame themselves when their kid gets diabetes. They think it's something they've done or the genes in their body that caused it. That's not true. But it's easy for parents to believe. And so they may try to make up for it by trying to take charge of your diabetes—take charge of *you*.

And remember - it's your parents' job to look out for you. They're responsible for keeping you healthy until you're ready to take care of yourself.

Of course, the older you get and the more experience you have, the better you'll be at taking care of yourself. The problem comes in getting you and your parents to

agree on what you can do on your own, and what you need their help in doing.

So try this: Make a list. Sit down with your parents and together write down everything that needs to be done to manage diabetes. (You'll be amazed at everything there is to do.) Then, work together to decide who's going to be responsible for each of the things you've listed. Some of them will be things only your parents can do for now. Others will be things only you can do.

But there will be a lot of things that need to be done that could be done by either you or your parents. Work together to decide which of those things you could do.

Talk about those things.

You'll probably want to take charge before they think you're ready. You have to convince them that you're ready. And the only way you can do that is to show them you know what needs to be done, you understand why, and that you're able to do it without being asked – not just every once in a while, but every day.

Then, every couple of months or so, get together with your parents to see how you're doing. Take a look at the list you came up with together, and see if everyone agrees there are other things you can start to take charge of.

The important thing for you and your parents to keep in mind is that some day you're going to be on your own, away from them. And you're going to have to handle diabetes without them being there to ask all those questions. So use this time to learn with your parents looking over your shoulders.

A few other things you can do:

- ★ If you or your parents are grumpy about diabetes management, stop to think: are you mad at each other? Or are you mad at diabetes?
- ★ Let your parents know if their questions bother you when they ask them in public. If so, work with them to find a better way of handling those questions.
- ★ Answer your parent's questions before they ask. Tell them you've checked your blood sugar, what it was, and what, if anything, you think you ought to do about it – before they have time to even think about nagging.
- ★ Every once in a while, just walk up to them and give them a big old hug for helping you learn how to take care of yourself!

How to Deal with Friends

The first two things another kid will probably think when he or she learns you have diabetes are 1: That means you can't have ANY candy! And 2: You have to take SHOTS?!

Which is probably exactly what you thought if you were old enough to remember when you were diagnosed.

But you've come a long way since then. And so can your friends.

The most important thing you can do to help your friends understand how to handle your diabetes is to admit to them that, yes, there are some things you have to do and some things you shouldn't do because you have diabetes. But with the exception of those few things, you're just like any other kid. And they don't have to treat you any differently than you treat them.

Help them understand what diabetes is like for you. Let them know that you like candy as much as they do, and that by adjusting food, exercise, or insulin, sometimes you can eat some. But be sure to tell them it's important to keep yourself healthy. And that means staying away from the things that can throw you out of control.

When someone asks you a dumb question, give them a smart answer. You'll help them learn about how you handle your disease. And who knows – maybe someday they'll need to know that information to control their diabetes. Ask your teacher if he or she will help you share information about diabetes with your class.

Most importantly, try to find a friend who knows what to do if your blood sugar goes high, or especially if it goes low. That doesn't mean this kid has to play doctor and take care of you if anything happens, but it's good to have someone who understands what's normal for you and what's not. Someone who can call for help if you can't. Someone you can put up with you on your good days and bad days and who likes you just the same.

A few other things you can do:

- ★ Send your friends a letter from diabetes camp.
- ★ Take them along on an American Diabetes Association event like America's Walk for Diabetes or Tour de Cure.
- ★ If it isn't already, get your school involved in School Walk for Diabetes.
- ★ Using a new lancet, get your parents to help you check your

friends' blood sugar so they know it's no big deal.

- ★ Invite someone to dinner to show them you really can eat food that tastes great.

Teachers, Coaches, and Other Adults

If everyone in the world had to take a test on what diabetes is and what to do about it, your life would be a whole lot easier.

But the truth is a lot of people get things mixed up when they're trying to help a person with diabetes. For example, if a teacher or coach at your schools knows you have diabetes, they may grab a can of diet soda to help you get through a low blood sugar. Or, they may try to protect you by assuming you can't do some things that you really can.

Remember, these people aren't doing these things to be mean. They're doing what they think is right for you. If they're mistaken, help them learn what you really do need.

Ask for a conference with your teachers at the beginning of the school year. Bring your parents, a letter from your health care team, and share with the group the information you want them to know about how you control diabetes, and what they can do to help.

A few other things you can do:

- ★ Ask your teachers or coaches if they know anyone else who has diabetes. There's a good chance they do.
- ★ Talk to the American Diabetes Association in your community about doing a presentation or special event at your school.
- ★ Remember: The only dumb question is the one that doesn't get asked.

You can help people get smart and comfortable with your diabetes by being

patient with them. Their questions may sound stupid to you, but the answers you give them can help them learn.

To Learn More:

- ★ Log on to our Web site at www.diabetes.org/wizdom, or browse all the things you can download for free: diabetes.org/wizdom/download
- ★ Want more? We've got Print-On-Demands ("PODs") on school, teen issues, traveling, sick days, and more. Download copies at diabetes.org/wizdom/download or call at 1.800.DIABETES and we'll mail them to you.
- ★ Your American Diabetes Association has a ton of books for kids and teens with diabetes. Visit our online store at <http://store.diabetes.org>, or browse at your favorite bookstore!
- ★ **Diabetes Forecast** is a monthly magazine for people with diabetes and their families. It's free to members of the American Diabetes Association. Join today by calling us at 1-800-806-7801.
- ★ Give your parents a hand: Invite them to check out our online parent forums. Tell them to go to our Web site at diabetes.org. Then click on "**Community and Resources**," then "**Community Forums**."
- ★ Questions or comments? Want to tell us how you're doing? Send us an e-mail at wizdom@diabetes.org