

Leaving Home For Life On Your Own

The year after high school graduation is full of changes. You may face diabetes challenges whether you go to college or enter the work world.

Start Off Right

Before leaving home, you should be ready to manage all of your diabetes care. You need to get your skills down pat while your family and diabetes team can help.

Make a list of your diabetes supplies. You will need to buy these regularly to keep from running out.

Talk with your diabetes educator to help you plan how to fit diabetes care into your new life.

If you don't have a medical ID bracelet or necklace, buy one, and wear it.

Prepare For A Doctor's Visit

If you don't move away, your new insurance may allow you to keep your current diabetes care team. Find out from your parents:

- Phone numbers for your team members
- How often you should see each one

- How far ahead you need to schedule visits
- What you should take to visits

If you go away to school, set up a visit with the student health center to discuss your diabetes. Take a copy of your medical records, a list of your drugs, and your treatment plan. Find out what services (including flu, meningitis, and hepatitis shots) student health provides and their cost. Ask how you should get rid of sharps. If its diabetes services are scanty, ask your former diabetes team to help you find other diabetes care in your college town. If student health is not open around the clock, find out where to get urgent care during off-hours.

As long as you are a student, your parents' health insurance will probably cover your care and prescriptions, including supplies. If you use a mail order service, you will need to communicate with your parents and the prescription service to make sure you have enough supplies at school. You should identify a pharmacy where you are going to school.

Obtain prescriptions from your diabetes team to take to a pharmacy near your school as a backup in an emergency (i.e. you drop your last bottle of insulin.)

If you are moving away for a job, talk to your diabetes team before you go. Ask for suggestions for diabetes care providers and educators in your new town. Get extra copies of your medical records in case you don't click with the first doctor or educator you try. Make finding a new health care team a top priority.

Drink Safely

Social life among your peers may center on drinking. You should know that alcohol puts you at risk for low blood glucose levels for 6 to 36 hours. Alcohol can make it hard to tell that your blood glucose levels are dropping too low (hypoglycemia).

You may choose not to drink. If so, seek out events that do not involve drinking. For example, join a club or take part in volunteer work or your local church, synagogue, or mosque.

If you do drink:

- Eat before and while drinking.
- Set limits ahead of time, and stop drinking when you reach them.
- If your diabetes is not in good control, skip drinking.
- Drink only with people you trust and who know what to do if you have hypoglycemia.
- Test your blood glucose levels while drinking and carefully for at least 24 hours after drinking alcohol.

Prepare For Sick Days

Take your sick-day plan with you. If you do not have a sick-day plan, work with your health care team to create one before you leave home. It should include what drugs to take when you are sick, how to adjust your insulin, and a list of the symptoms that should prompt you to call your doctor.

You will need to keep on hand sick-day foods. These include regular and sugar-free caffeine-free soft drinks, regular and sugar-free pudding and gelatin mixes, juice, instant soup mix, and crackers. You'll also need to have ketone strips

and a thermometer. You may wish to stock up on cold remedies as well.

When you are not feeling well, test your blood glucose and urine ketone levels at least every 3–4 hours.

You should try to eat. If your stomach rebels, try light foods such as crackers, chicken soup, and sugared soda. Every hour, try to eat something with about 15 grams of carbohydrates and drink a cup of fluid. Take your insulin unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

Tell Friends

For safety's sake, tell your roommate(s), resident advisor,

neighbor(s), co-workers, or new friends you have diabetes. Your life could be at risk if you had hypoglycemia and your roommate did not know what to do.

You should explain to key people what hypoglycemia is, what its symptoms are, and what they should do. All should know to call 911 if they find you unconscious or cannot wake you. You should also ask some people to learn how to give you a glucagon shot.

If you are an athlete, your coach and teammates need to know about your diabetes and how to treat hypoglycemia.

Learn More

- Tips for College Students:
<http://www.childrensdiabetesfdn.com/educ/college.htm>
- Countdown to College:
 - ✓ <http://www.diabetes.org/all-about-diabetes/diabetes-news/enews-archive/04-08-04.jsp>
 - ✓ <http://www.diabetes.org/all-about-diabetes/diabetes-news/enews-archive/05-06-04.jsp>
 - ✓ <http://www.diabetes.org/all-about-diabetes/diabetes-news/enews-archive/08-05-04.jsp>
- Getting Ready for College:
<http://www.diabetesselfmanagement.com/print.cfm?aid=1224>

