

# Type 2 diabetes and physical activity



Diabetes  
förbundet

## What is physical activity?

Our bodies need exercise in order for us to stay healthy. Physical activity is important and beneficial for everyone but particularly for people with type 2 diabetes. Physical activity can be anything from everyday chores to walking to the shops, cleaning or working out at the gym, dancing or doing some form of sport. If you have a job where you are sedentary or spend a lot of the day sitting, you will need to incorporate some exercise into your routine. This could be something as simple as standing during a coffee break, working standing up for part of the day or not sitting down for the entire evening but to switch between sitting and standing during the evening .

## Why is physical activity good if you have type 2 diabetes?

Physical activity offers many benefits for people with type 2 diabetes, but it particularly helps you to maintain your blood sugar level at the right level.

Physical activity lowers your blood sugar level, cholesterol and blood pressure, which is important for type 2 diabetes. It also reduces the amount of insulin you need and makes the insulin in your body more effective. Participating in physical activity will reduce the risk of developing diabetes related complications such as cardiovascular diseases such as high blood pressure, angina, myocardial infarction and stroke. Diabetes increases the risk of developing these diseases.

Physical activity also has an effect on both sleep and stress. Being physically active can improve your sleep and help your body deal with the everyday effects of stress.

The effects of physical activity can last as long as 24 hours after the activity has ended. It is never too later to become physically active and the benefits are immediate. It does not matter which activity you choose to do you do, as long as you are physically active.

## How much exercise do I need to do?

You need to be physically active for 30 minutes a day. This includes everything you do during the day. One example might be to take the stairs rather than taking the elevator or going for an extra walk during the day.

To improve your energy levels and fitness, you need to be physically active 2-3 times a week for a continuous period of at least 30 minutes. This is called "aerobic activity". This form of activity raises your pulse and makes you feel warmer, e.g. going for a fast walk, taking the stairs or biking. When your pulse increases, your heart beats faster and sometimes also harder. The heart is a muscle that benefits from exercise.

During physical exertion, we become warmer and start sweating, which is entirely natural. If you have not exercised vigorously before, start gently and gradually increase the amount of exercise you do. This will also help you avoid injuries from the training like sprained ankle or strains.

## When do I need to be careful about exercising?

If you have a cardiovascular disease, discuss with your doctor the exercise level that suits you. If you are ill and have a fever wait until you have recovered. If you have insulin treatment and your blood sugar level is above 15 mmol/l, wait until your blood sugar level goes down to 5 mmol/l before starting to exercise. A gentle walk can lower your blood sugar level. If it is below 5 mmol/l, eat a snack such as a fruit or a sandwich before you start exercising. If you already have changes in your eyesight (retinopathy), avoid weight lifting training and discuss with your physician what the suitable form of training for you is.

## Before you start exercising

If you are having insulin treatment, you may need to reduce the amount of insulin you take and measure your blood sugar level before, during and after exercise in order to find the right insulin doses. Always carry dextrose, a sweet drink or a fruit which you can eat or drink if your blood sugar level starts to drop.

Ask your diabetes nurse or doctor for advice.

## Simple tips to get you started

You can get help from a physiotherapist to get started and find a form of exercise that you enjoy and can continue with.

Your diabetes nurse or doctor can tell you how to get in touch with a physiotherapist.

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator
- Get off the bus one stop earlier and walk the last bit to your final destination
- If you normally have a sedentary lifestyle, stand up and walk around for a few minutes every half an hour
- Walk with the children to preschool or school, instead of taking the car or bus
- Experiment to find what works for you The best form of physical activity is the one that you can enjoy

Type 2 diabetes – read the fact sheet “Type 2 diabetes” [www.diabetes.se](http://www.diabetes.se)

Physical activity – any and all daily movement that you do, e.g. walking to the shops, cleaning or walking to meet a friend.

Aerobic exercise – physical activity which lasts for 30 minutes and makes you feel warmer and increases your pulse.