Helpful advice

the

Diabetes

Guidebook

*

All the basics you need
to live a healthy life with
Type 2 diabetes

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Here it is!

I am so excited to share this Diabetes Guidebook with you.

We published a Type 1 Diabetes Guidebook a few years ago, but we've never had one place to put all our most helpful information about Type 2 diabetes: whether you've just been diagnosed, or just need a refresher on the basics.

Now we do! In this book, you'll find all the essentials you need to live a healthy life with Type 2 diabetes. What diabetes is, how to test your blood sugar, food and exercise advice and - of course - mental health tips.

Living with diabetes is hard, and exhausting, but you're not alone in this.

We hope the tips in these pages help to make diabetes easier to understand and manage...
And we look forward to connecting online, on our website and social media.

Please let us know what you think, and if you have any other questions we can answer.

Here's to a healthy, happy life with diabetes!

Bridget

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

sweetlife

Visit **www.sweetlife.org.za** to find out how to live a happy, healthy life with diabetes.

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South Africans with Diabetes
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Diabetes Fact Sheet

There are two types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2

Type 1 diabetes is an auto-immune condition and cannot be cured. Type 2 diabetes is often called a lifestyle condition, because an unhealthy lifestyle (too much junk food, not enough exercise, carrying extra weight) can put you at increased risk. There is a strong hereditary link, though, and it's important to note that nobody 'gives' themselves diabetes. Type 2 diabetes can be reversed if diagnosed early enough.

Diabetes is a condition in which insulin doesn't work properly

Insulin is like a key that gets glucose from your blood to your cells for energy. With diabetes, the glucose (from your food) can't pass from your blood to your cells properly. In Type 1 diabetes, the body doesn't make insulin. In Type 2 diabetes, the body makes too little insulin, or the insulin can't be used properly. When there isn't enough insulin, glucose builds up in the blood and causes high blood sugar.

Diabetes affects every kind of person, without question

All kinds of people can get diabetes: young and old, every gender, every race, every body type, sexual orientation and socio-economic background.

Stigma is dangerous

Being afraid to speak up about diabetes can lead to delaying treatment and long-term complications. With the right treatment and support, you can live a happy, healthy life with diabetes.

#DiabetesLooksLikeMe
shows us that anyone can live with diabetes.

Find out more at
www.sweetlife.org.za/diabeteslookslikeme

Facts

- 1 in 2 South Africans with diabetes are undiagnosed.
- Diabetes is the number 1 killer of men and women in South Africa.
- If diagnosed early enough, it's possible to live a healthy, happy life with diabetes.

CLICKS

Diabetes Nurse Educator Consultation

A supportive, **patient-centred process** where a trained diabetes nurse educator helps the patient with diabetes understand their condition and develop the knowledge, skills, **and confidence to manage it.**

The patient will learn to:

- Monitor and understand blood glucose readings
- Make healthier meal and activity choices
- Cope with the emotional aspects of living with diabetes

Diabetes HbA1c Testing

Measures the **blood glucose levels** over the previous three months for people with diabetes and pre-diabetes.

To book your Diabetes HbA1c Test or Diabetes Nurse Educator consultation, scan the QR code below.

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Choose your health.
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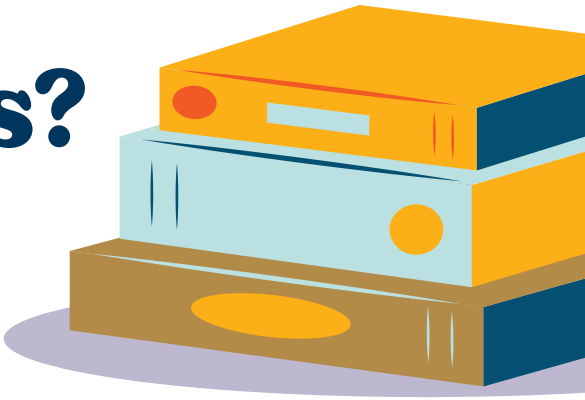
What is diabetes?

Let's understand the basics



When it comes to diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2 are the most common types - but it's also important to understand gestational diabetes. ***Type 1 diabetes*** is an auto-immune condition and is often diagnosed in children (but also in adults). ***Type 2 diabete***s is often called a lifestyle condition because it can be triggered by eating unhealthy food, not exercising and carrying extra weight. It also has a strong hereditary factor. Gestational diabetes is only diagnosed during pregnancy.

Let's take a closer look...

Type 1 diabetes is an auto-immune condition that occurs when the pancreas stops producing insulin. The diabetes diagnosis is often very sudden and dramatic, usually in hospital. Everyone with Type 1 diabetes has to take insulin – either as injections or in a pump.

Type 1 diabetes is most often diagnosed in children or youth under 30 – the most common ages of diagnosis are 2 to 4, and 11 to 14. It is also diagnosed in adults.

Type 2 diabetes is the more common type: 90% of people with diabetes have Type 2. If it is diagnosed early enough, it can be reversed. Type 2 diabetes is hereditary (it runs in families). The diagnosis can be delayed for years, as symptoms can be easily missed.

Children can develop Type 2 diabetes, usually if they're carrying excess weight, but it's less common. People with Type 2 diabetes usually start taking tablets first, then insulin.

Gestational diabetes is diagnosed during pregnancy and often 'goes away' after the baby is born.

However, it leaves both the mom and the baby at greater risk of developing Type 2 diabetes later in life, so it's important to be aware of the risks and make the right lifestyle choices to prevent developing Type 2 diabetes. Eat healthy, exercise, lose weight if you need to – the same things we all need to do, whether or not we have diabetes!

Type 1 or Type 2

So you have diabetes?

TEEL to feel good

T ***Take your medication.***

Every day. As your doctor tells you to.

E ***Eat healthy food.***

Fill half of your plate with green, leafy vegetables for lunch and dinner.

E ***Exercise a little each day.***

Starting with a little daily exercise, aim for fast 30-minute walks every day.

L ***Lose weight if you need to.***

Small changes can make a big difference. Drink water, not juice or fizzy drinks.

We know it isn't easy.

Just take it one step at a time. You can do it!

Follow TEEL to live a healthy, happy life with diabetes.

You are not alone in this...

We know what it's like. Millions of South Africans are living with diabetes, and understand how you feel.

Please join our community:

South Africans with Diabetes

www.sweetlife.org.za

@sweetlife.org.za

Best advice *from* people with Type 2

"Eating healthy is medicine. Exercise is medicine. Drink water. Lose weight."

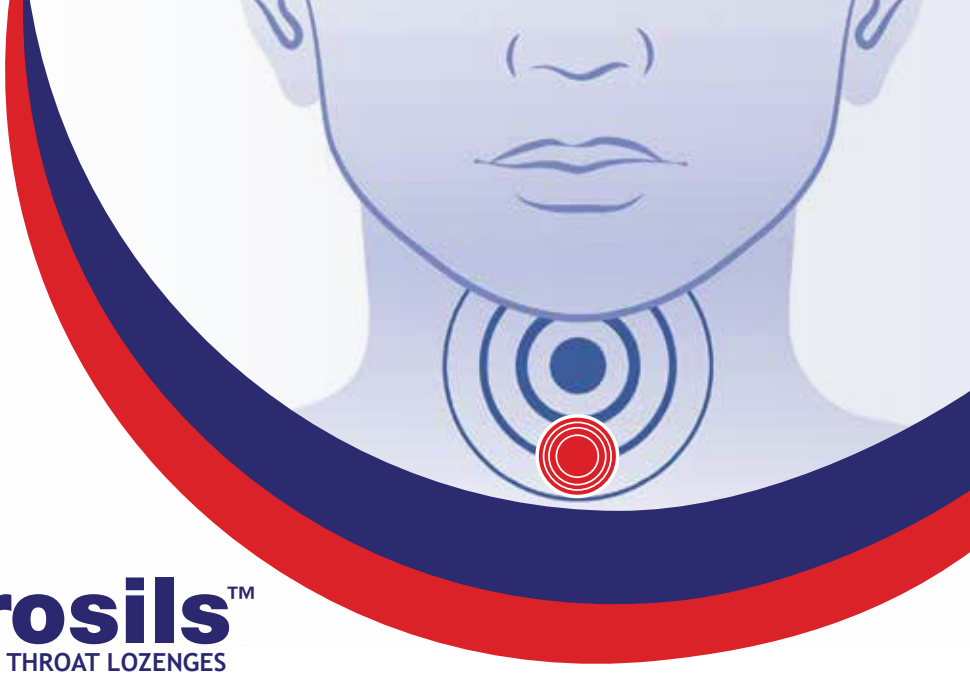
Lindy Johnson

"Learn to test your blood sugar at the same time every day."

Carol Hendricks

"It's difficult to single out one specific thing. Reducing my stress levels by focusing on what is in my control, rather than overthinking everything, has made a huge difference in my life."

Mark Savary



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activo health

A fresh look at food

Approaching food differently

There can be a lot of emotion surrounding food when you're living with diabetes. The truth is that you can eat whatever you want, but some foods will definitely spike your blood sugar, which will make you feel tired or grumpy or unwell later. Sometimes, this trade-off is worth it – a piece of cake at a friend's birthday party, an ice-cream cone on a hot summer's day, popcorn at the cinema – everyone will make different choices.

The trick is to make it a choice.
Rather than just eating what everyone else is eating, ask yourself: **Is it worth the spike?** Sometimes it's worth it! Sometimes it isn't.

Decide on your approach

There's no such thing as a diabetes diet – which means that there's no right or wrong way to eat. However, there are many different approaches. Some people believe in a strict low-carb eating plan (with very limited carbohydrates and a high fat or protein intake), while others believe in a moderate diet. Some want to fit into family meals, while others want to change the way their families eat. Some believe in treats for special occasions, others don't. There is no clear-cut way to eat when you have diabetes. Every person is different.

Consistency is key

Whatever approach you choose, the more consistent you can be about certain aspects, the better. Most people don't want to eat the same thing for breakfast and lunch every day, but if you can find a few options that work and alternate between them, you'll make your life a lot easier.

Don't get weird about food

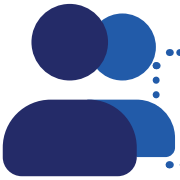
Difficult as it may seem, you don't want to turn food into an issue. Labelling foods 'good' or 'bad', hiding from family members to eat treats for fear of judgement, calling it 'cheating' when you eat something with sugar or carbs – none of that is necessary.
It's an easy trap to fall into, but in essence, we should all be eating more fresh food, less junk food, and cutting out refined carbs – with or without diabetes. You just have a good reason to do it!

Knowledge is power

Understanding what to eat – and in which portions – can make managing your diabetes a lot easier. That's why we created the **Healthy Food Guide**, on page 12...

Did you know?
The order you eat your food in can help the blood sugar spike too! Start with vegetables, then have your protein, and save carbs for last.

Vitamin B Deficiency and Diabetes: The Hidden Link

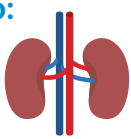


589 million people worldwide are living with diabetes, and **1 in 2** may be Vitamin B-deficient.[1-3]

B vitamins are powerful nutrients that help the body make energy and support overall health.[4] But, research shows that specific **B vitamins (B1, B6 & B12) are linked to diabetes and vice versa.**[3]

Diabetes can cause Vitamin B deficiency due to:

↑ renal clearance[5]
High blood sugar in diabetes can make the body pass more urine, "flushing away" Vitamin B.



↑ protein metabolism[5]
High blood sugar in diabetes can make the body pass more urine, "flushing away" Vitamin B.

↑ inflammation[2,6]
Body inflammation is common in diabetes, which can drain Vitamin B stores.

Metformin treatment[5]
Metformin, a common diabetes medicine, can interfere with the body's absorption of Vitamin B, leading to lower levels.

Vitamin B deficiency can worsen diabetes by:[3]

Disrupting glucose (sugar) control
This makes it harder for the body to use sugar properly, increasing blood sugar levels.

Disrupting insulin function
This reduces how much insulin the body makes and how well it works.

Complicating diabetes-related problems
Low Vitamin B can weaken small blood vessels, affecting circulation.

Harming nerve health
This can cause or worsen neuropathy (nerve damage and pain).

Early diagnosis and treatment can reduce the impact of diabetes.[1]
Speak to your healthcare professional today.

References: 1. International Diabetes Federation. Facts & figures [Internet]. [cited 2025 Sep 05]. Available from: https://idf.org/about-diabetes/diabetes-facts-figures/. **2.** Zang Y, Jiang D, Zhuang X, Chen S. Changes in the central nervous system in diabetic neuropathy. *Heliyon.* 2023;**9**(8):1-8. **3.** Yahaya TO, Yusuf AB, Danjuma JK, Usman BM, Ishiaku YM. Mechanistic links between vitamin deficiencies and diabetes mellitus: a review. *Egypt J Basic Appl Sci.* 2021;**8**(1):189-202. **4.** Nutritional Medicine Institute. B Vitamin Group: Energy, Nervous System and Mitochondrial Support [Internet]. [cited 2025 Sep 05]. Available from: https://www.nmi.health/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/B-Vitamin-Group_Clincal-Guide-1.pdf#:~:text=B%20vitamins%20represent%20a%20large%20group%20of%20water-soluble,action%2C%20they%20also%20have%20complementary%20and%20overlapping%20functions. **5.** Raghuvanshi D, Chakole S, Kumar M. Relationship Between Vitamins and Diabetes. *Cureus.* 2023;**15**(3):e36815. **6.** Chiang E, Smith, DE, Selhub J, Dallal G, Wang Y, Roubenoff R. Inflammation causes tissue specific depletion of vitamin B6. *Arthritis Res Ther.* 2005;**7**(6):R1254-R1262.

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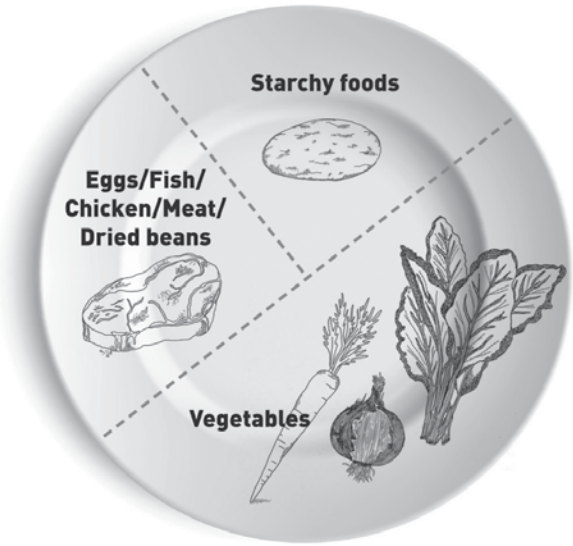
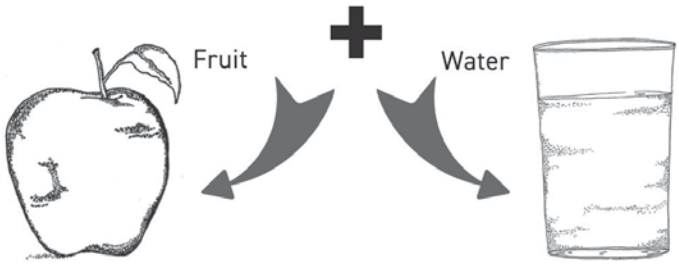
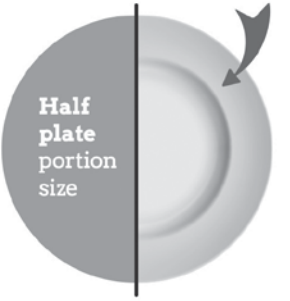
Healthy Food Guide

My plate

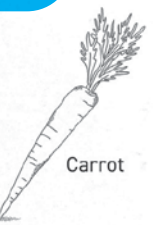




Vegetables




Onion


Carrot


Pepper


Broccoli and cauliflower

Mushrooms


Tomato


Beans


Gem squash

Frozen vegetables

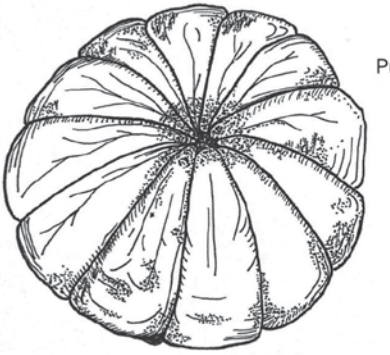
Frozen peas

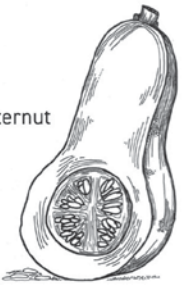

Cabbage


Spinach

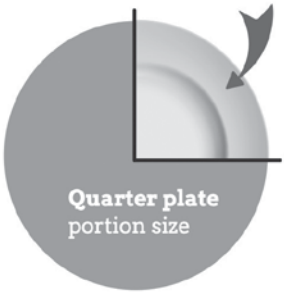

Lettuce


Cucumber

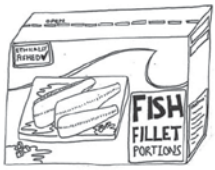

Pumpkin


Butternut

Eggs / Fish Chicken / Meat




Egg



Frozen fish

Canned fish


Lean meat

Mince

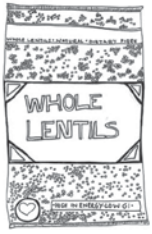

Skinless chicken

Maas

Milk

Plain yoghurt

Soya mince



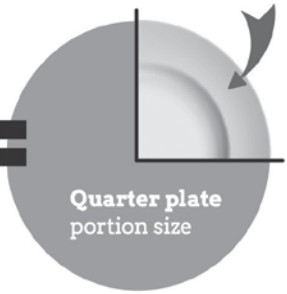
Lentils

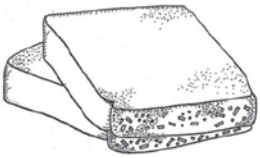
Baked beans

Split peas

Cooked beans

Starchy foods





Wholewheat bread

Potato

Pap

Samp

Wholewheat pasta

Brown rice

You're not alone in this!

Please join our community on
Facebook: South Africans with Diabetes.

Or visit **www.sweetlife.org.za** for diabetes and food info.

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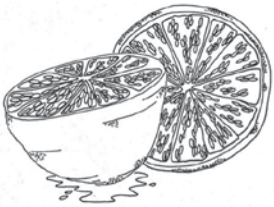
Fruit

1 piece of fruit **with each meal,** or **as a snack.**

Apple

Banana

Pear



Orange

Naartjie

Mango

Peach

Oils

Choose from **these good fats.**

Sunflower oil
Canola oil

OR

Olive oil

Two teaspoons with a meal

Margarine

OR

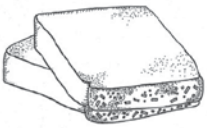
Peanut butter

Quarter avo

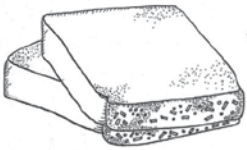
OR

Peanuts

Make the right choices



Two slices



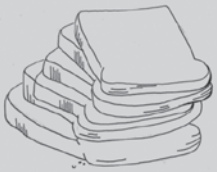
Wholewheat

Lean meat

Skinless chicken

Fresh vegetables

Many slices



White bread

Fatty meat

Chicken with skin

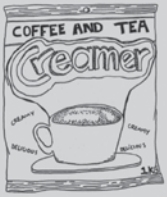
Canned vegetables

Low-fat milk

Full cream milk

Fresh milk

Creamer



Water

Sugary drink

Brown rice

White rice

Wholewheat pasta

Regular pasta or 2 minute noodles

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Structured blood sugar testing

What is it and – more importantly – how can it help your diabetes?

Limited testing strips, maximum results

If you don't have a lot of testing strips but want to make sure you use them in a smart way, structured testing is a good idea. It lets you go about your day as usual, while testing at set times to give the maximum amount of information for you and your doctor.

Structured testing can help you:

→ See how certain activities affect your blood sugar.

→ Identify blood sugar patterns when you do something different.

→ Problem solve high and low blood sugar patterns.

→ Discuss with your doctor if you need to make any changes.

There are two methods to try:

1.

Pattern management

For 3 days in a row, test your blood sugar before each meal, 2 hours after each meal, and before bed.

With each test:

- Make a note if your meal was small / medium / large.
- Make a note if you took any medication (tablets / insulin), when and how much.
- Make a note if your energy levels were low or high (on a scale of 1 to 5).

2.

Before-and-after testing

For 7 days in a row, test before and after a specific meal or activity to see how one thing in your daily routine affects your blood sugar.

When to use this method:

- If you're newly diagnosed.
- If you're starting a new medication.
- If you're starting a new type of exercise.
- If you keep spiking after a certain meal, and you're not sure why.

NB! Keep a note of your results, and share them with your doctor!

7 Day Healthy Eating Meal Plan

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Breakfast 2 Weetbix + low fat milk + apple	**Breakfast** Oats + low fat milk + orange	**Breakfast** Mabele porridge + low fat milk + peach
Lunch Green salad + hard boiled egg + roasted sweet potato + banana	**Lunch** Salad + tuna + low fat mayo + lettuce + 2 slices wholewheat bread + apple	**Lunch** Broccoli + cauliflower + grated cheese + baked potato + orange
Dinner Broccoli + cauliflower + mince + pasta	**Dinner** Spinach + mushrooms + pumpkin + chicken breast + relish + potato	**Dinner** Roasted vegetables + fish + sweet potato


Day 4
Day 5
Day 6
Day 7

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4

Breakfast
Plain low fat yoghurt + mango

Lunch
Salad + soya mince + samp + beans + peach

Dinner
Vegetarian curry bowl + brown rice

Day 5

Breakfast
All Bran flakes + low fat milk + banana

Lunch
Coleslaw + peanut butter + 2 slices brown bread + naartjie

Dinner
Green beans + gem squash + lentil boboti + brown rice

Day 6

Breakfast
2 slices wholewheat bread + eggs + tomato + pear

Lunch
Stirfry vegetables + chicken strips + brown rice + pear

Dinner
Cabbage + carrot + lean steak + tomato soup + pap

Day 7

Breakfast
2 slices wholewheat toast + fried egg + orange

Lunch
Steamed carrots + cabbage + tinned fish + brown pap + grapes

Dinner
Green salad + chicken strips + yoghurt dressing + butternut

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Move your body

Have you been putting off getting fit because it feels too hard or you don't have time? Not any more!

Sometimes 'exercise' can feel like a big word... Too exhausting to even begin! But there's no need to join the gym. Just moving your body for thirty minutes every day is enough to lose weight and manage your diabetes better. Half an hour! **Everyone can find half an hour a day.**

While it might be tricky to start the habit, once you're in the rhythm of moving your body every day, you'll start feeling better – stronger, with more energy – and want to keep going. One of the best ways to start a new habit is to find someone to do it with. Do you have a friend who also wants to move more? Can you commit to meeting every weekday for half an hour for the next two weeks?

Top tip!

Pair your exercise with something you really look forward to: binge-watching your favourite show, listening to podcasts or audio books. And only let yourself do that thing when you exercise!

5 *Here are five fun ideas →*

Move your body

30

minutes a day!

1. Before (or after!) work

Walking is a simple and relaxing way to get your heart rate up. Beaches, forests, parks and rivers are all great, but a quick stroll through your neighbourhood can be just as enjoyable. Choose a time for your daily walk – half an hour before work, for example – and try to do it every day. Walk quickly and keep things interesting by changing your route. Invite a friend to make your walk even more fun.

2. On your way to work

If you live close to your workplace, choose to walk or cycle instead of driving or catching public transport. If your home is too far away, get out of the taxi a few stops early, or park further away than usual. Using your morning commute to exercise can help you save time, and also make you feel refreshed for the day ahead.

Choosing to walk part of the way home after work can help to burn away the day's stress and clear your mind. It's helpful to use your phone to track how many steps you take – then you can set your own daily goals. Remember, though, that this is a flexible habit, depending on the weather or other circumstances, and that's totally fine. **Doing it is more important than doing it perfectly.**

3. In the office

Quiet times at work are ideal for a quick workout: you can do an easy muscle-toning routine while sitting at your desk.

Start by tightening your three main muscle groups, one at a time (legs, tummy and arms).

› Take a deep breath, then clench your legs for 5 seconds. Take a 10-second break before tightening

your tummy muscles for 5 seconds.

- Take another short breather, then clench your arms and chest. Do this by pressing your palms together as if you're praying.

- Add some gentle arm and neck stretches: roll your shoulders back and down, and sit tall by lengthening your spine.

- Repeat for as long as you can without anyone noticing!

Exercise is a superpower for diabetes

→ Helps your body to use insulin better.

→ Prevents cardiovascular (heart) disease and other diabetes-related complications.

→ Reduces stress and anxiety, which makes it easier to manage your condition.

→ Improves your blood sugar.

4. At home

We all make excuses to stay inside: it might be raining, or you have a lot to do, or the TV is calling your name. Don't let this stop you from getting your daily dose of exercise!

When you're talking on the phone, pace around the house or climb up and down stairs, rather than sitting down. Sweeping, mopping, scrubbing and washing can give you a great workout and a clean house at the same time. Feel like watching your favourite TV show? No problem – use the time to jog lightly on the spot, while gently punching your arms in front of you like you're boxing. Just be sure to pull the curtains so your neighbours don't think you're crazy!

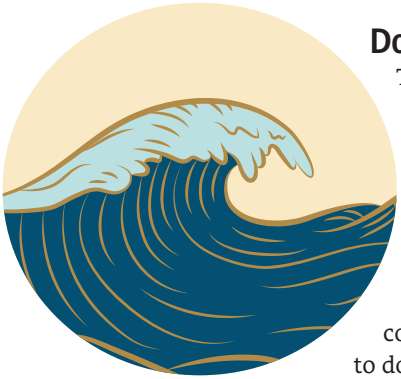
5. On the weekend

If you're looking for a fun way to exercise, how about a dance party? Listen to your favourite playlist, focus on letting loose and just enjoy yourself – before you know it, you'll have worked up a sweat.

Remember, all you need to make a habit part of daily life is repetition. Think of it as a habit streak – can you do the same thing for 7 days, 14 days, 30 days? **You've learnt a new habit!**

Mental health & diabetes

Mental health is a big part of life with diabetes.



Living with a chronic condition can be exhausting. We are slowly getting better at talking about mental health and diabetes – and the reality of diabetes burnout, which affects nearly all of us at some stage in our diabetes journey. And it's not just once, either! Coming in waves, diabetes burnout occurs when the overwhelm just gets too much.

Take it one step at a time

You don't have to master all of diabetes in one day – it's impossible, and too much to even try. Consider one small change you can make today that might make things easier. Could you check your blood sugar more often so you have a clearer picture? Choose a healthier option for lunch? Think of one thing that won't overwhelm you.

Don't judge yourself

There's no such thing as perfection when it comes to diabetes. All you can do is to try your best today, and then try your best tomorrow – for all the todays and tomorrows to come. That is all you need to do! **We don't need to attach emotion to blood sugar numbers: they really are just numbers.**

Share how you feel

Whether it's with a close friend, partner or family member, on a diabetes WhatsApp group, or on social media, it can be so helpful to share how you're feeling. Trying to figure out diabetes in your head – on your own – is a recipe for confusion. When you share that some days it sucks, confuses you, or makes you angry, it will help you to see that you're not alone… we all feel like that.

One step at a time, without judgement.

"As people with diabetes, we're at a high risk of developing burnout, but also clinical depression and anxiety disorders.

If you don't know how to move forward, it's important to ask for help. Ask a friend, family member, doctor or therapist. **You are not alone in this.**"

Daniel Sher,
Clinical Psychologist living with diabetes.

Expert *advice:*

"Living with diabetes often means carrying a heavy mental load: one that isn't always visible to others."

Diabetes distress, also known as diabetes burnout, is very real and very common. It can leave you feeling stuck, defeated, overwhelmed and hopeless.

Make space for self-compassion, and carve out time in your day to do something that makes you feel good.

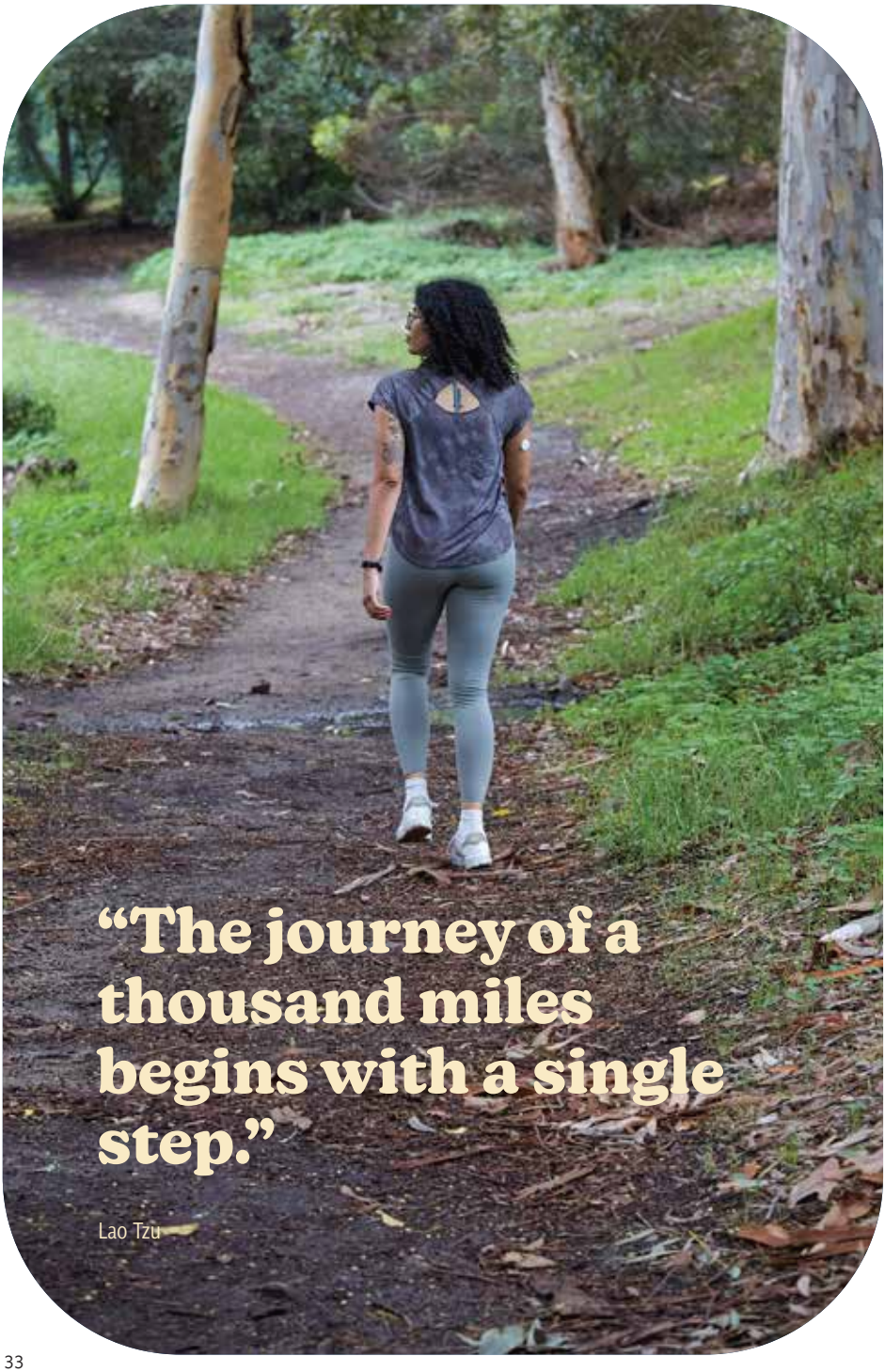
Let loved ones in and allow them to walk the road with you.

Daniel Sher,
Clinical Psychologist living with diabetes.

In case you need to hear it

- You are doing so well.
- Diabetes is a challenge for everyone.
- Diabetes is not your fault.
- There's no such thing as a perfect diabetic.
- All you can do is try your best.
- Anyone would find this hard.
- Just take it one day at a time.
- Tomorrow is a new chance to start again.
- We're all in this together.

What would you like someone to say to you about diabetes?


“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”
Lao Tzu

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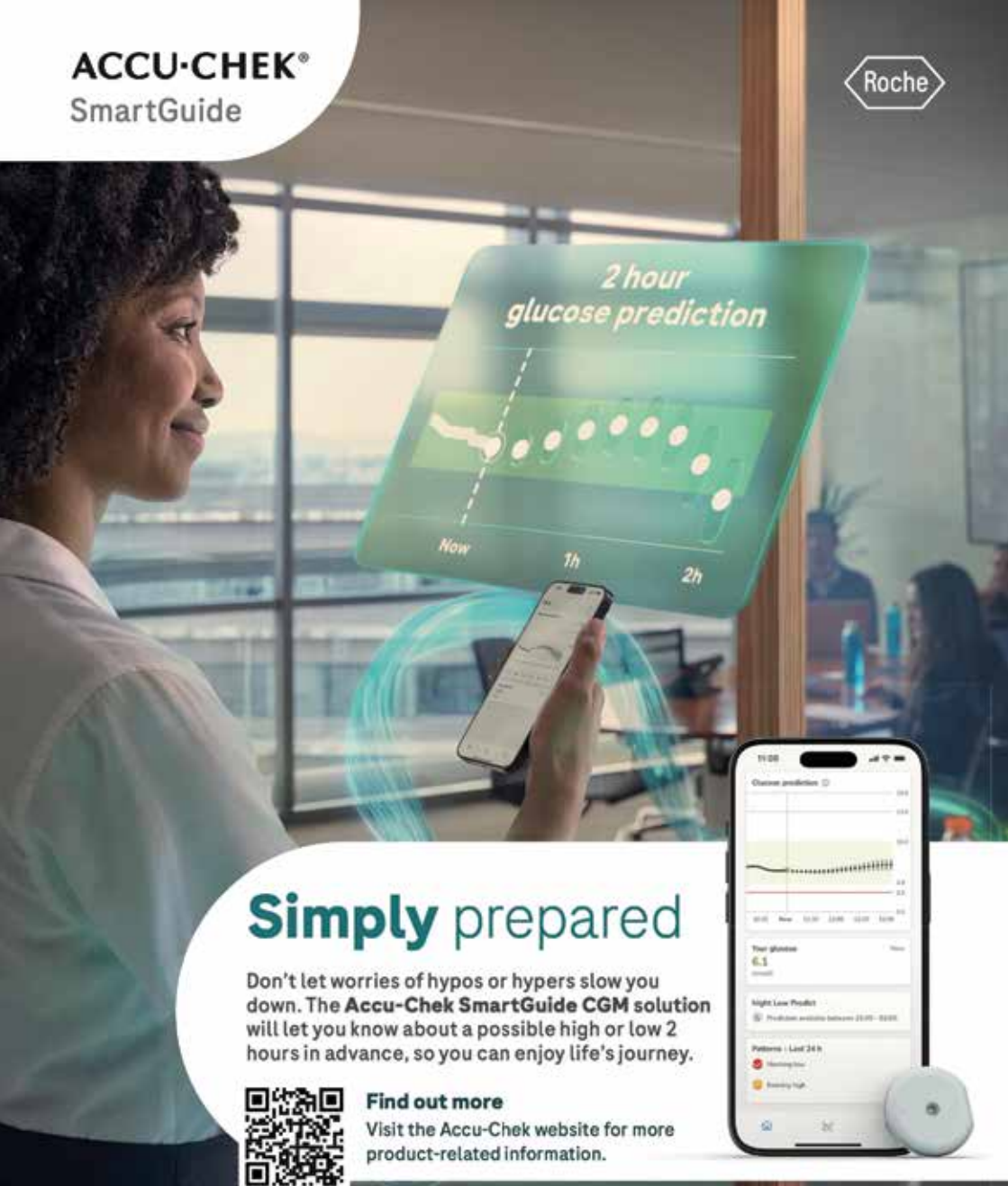

Simply prepared

Don't let worries of hypos or hypers slow you down. The **Accu-Chek SmartGuide CGM solution** will let you know about a possible high or low 2 hours in advance, so you can enjoy life's journey.

Find out more
Visit the Accu-Chek website for more product-related information.

For more information contact your healthcare professional.

Contact our Customer Support Centre to confirm smartphone compatibility with the Accu-Chek SmartGuide apps.

Email: info@accu-chek.co.za | Toll Free: 080-34-22-38-37 (South Africa only) | Website: www.accu-chekafrica.com

The Accu-Chek SmartGuide CGM solution is intended for adults with diabetes aged 18+. The screens you see may differ from the screens in the app. All names and data shown have been created for demonstration purposes only and do not relate to real-life patients.

You're not alone in this!

Please join our community on Facebook: **South Africans with Diabetes.**

Or visit **www.sweetlife.org.za** for answers to your questions about life with diabetes.

sweetlife