



Diabetes and Palliative Care

Information for family members/carers

Family members or carers such as husbands, wives, partners, friends, daughters or sons often play an important role by supporting their relative or friend with diabetes who is receiving palliative care.

This brochure tells family members/carers:

- Some important information about caring for diabetes during palliative care.
- How to get help for the person needing care with diabetes.
- When and who to ask for advice.



Why is it important to manage diabetes during palliative care?

People with diabetes receiving palliative care want to be comfortable. They want to avoid high and low blood glucose levels, which cause discomfort such as headaches and feeling dizzy or tired.

Sometimes it is hard to know whether a person feels unwell because of their diabetes, their other illness, or the medicines they take.

Checking blood glucose is one way to find out whether diabetes could be making the person needing care feel unwell.

The blood glucose levels tell you whether the person needing care's blood has too much or too little glucose. This information helps you to make decisions about how to make them more comfortable.



Information about blood glucose levels

Low blood glucose/hypo

Low blood glucose can make the person needing care feel weak, confused, irritable, hungry, tired or shaky. They may sweat a lot or get a headache. If their blood glucose drops very low, they could pass out or have a seizure.

High blood glucose/hyper

High blood glucose can make the person needing care feel thirsty and tired, have blurry vision, and have to wee (pass urine) often. Very high blood glucose may also make them feel nauseous or like they have to vomit.

Recommended blood glucose levels

Most people with diabetes will have a care plan that includes the blood glucose range that suits their needs. In general, blood glucose levels are low if they are below 6 and high if they are above 11.

Talking about diabetes care with the person who needs care

If the person needing care becomes sicker while they are receiving palliative care, it may become more difficult for them to take care of their diabetes. Talking about diabetes care with them will help you understand how they care for their diabetes now, and how they would like their diabetes to be cared for if they become too unwell to continue caring for themselves.

Tips for asking the person needing care about their diabetes care

- Ask them how they test their blood glucose. Ask them to show you how to do it.
- Ask them about their recommended blood glucose levels. Write these down in the box below.
- Ask them about their diabetes medicines. If they need to inject insulin, ask them to show you how to do it.
- Ask them how they recognise high blood glucose levels. Ask them how they recognise low blood glucose levels. Write these symptoms down in the box below. But note, their usual symptoms may change over time.
- Ask them how they feel about writing down how they want their diabetes cared for if they ever become too sick to speak for themselves. Writing down these wishes is called Advance Care Planning and it is a very important way people with diabetes can have a role in deciding their care.

The person needing care's symptoms of low blood glucose:

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Their symptoms of high blood glucose:

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Their recommended blood glucose levels:

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Talking about diabetes care with health professionals

- Talk with the health professionals caring for the person with diabetes about the recommended blood glucose levels for the person with diabetes, about what kind of diabetes medicines they need and how much they should take.
- If the person needing care is taking steroids, talk with their doctor about why they are taking steroids and how steroids affect blood glucose levels.
- Ask the diabetes educator to teach you how to test blood glucose and what to do if the person needing care has low or high blood glucose.
- Talk with the diabetes educator or dietitian about diabetes medicines and meal planning. Ask the diabetes educator what to do about diabetes medicines if the person needing care has a reduced appetite and eats less or misses meals.
- Ask the palliative care team to help the person needing care develop an Advance Care Plan that describes how they want their diabetes cared for if they ever become too sick to speak for themselves.

You can get more information by visiting websites such as:

- Diabetes: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
- Palliative care: www.palliativecare.org.au, www.caresearch.com.au
- Caring for a relative/friend: www.carersaustralia.com.au
- Advance Care Planning: www.caresearch.com.au/caresearch/tabid/1082/Default.aspx

You should seek help from a health professional if:

- the person needing care has blood glucose levels below 4
- the person needing care has blood glucose levels above 15
- the person needing care cannot swallow his/her diabetes tablets
- the person needing care cannot inject insulin
- the person needing care is in severe pain
- you are worried about the person needing care's health