

Taking good care of diabetes and your health means you must do at least a million different things—correctly and at the right time—each day. Well, maybe it isn't a million, but it seems like a lot, doesn't it?

For starters, you should: Eat fewer bad fats and more good fats, fewer bad carbs and more good carbs, more fruits and vegetables (but watch those blood glucose levels!). Oh yes, eat everything in moderation in smaller portions, and drink more water.

Don't forget your vitamins (but which ones?). Take medications faithfully, check your blood glucose regularly, don't forget to exercise, quit smoking, don't drink too much alcohol, see your doctor often, lose (or perhaps gain) some weight, keep your blood glucose down but be careful about lows, and don't forget to watch your blood pressure and cholesterol. The list goes on and on.

The ugly truth is that most people—despite their best intentions—can't do it all. Whenever I speak to large groups of people with diabetes, I ask, "How many here take care of their diabetes perfectly every day?" While two or three people raise their hands, hundreds of others sit with their hands at their sides.

Why can't most people follow all of their diabetes recommendations day in and day out? Unfortunately, good diabetes care must compete with other

priorities in your daily life—taking care of your children, working at your job, errands around the house, and so much more. There is just too much to do. So almost everyone makes compromises with their diabetes care, doing as much as they can with the limited time available. You must choose what is important, and let the rest go.

But of the million-plus tasks that diabetes requires, which are the most important? Which ones will give you the most bang for your buck and have the biggest impact on your long-term health? If you don't really know, you may be working hard on your diabetes management and still not be getting the results you want.

To start the conversation, here is my own list, *in order*, of the top 10 diabetes-related tasks likely to give you the biggest bang for your efforts. (Of course, this list shouldn't be taken as gospel; different patients have different needs, and your doctor may wish to set different priorities.)

1. Know your own numbers (at a minimum, A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol), know what they mean, and get these tests done regularly. Knowing exactly how well you are doing can provide the enthusiasm you need for all the tasks to follow.
2. If you smoke, find a way to quit.
3. Make sure you're on the right medications, and take them faithfully.

[guest editorial]

4. Engage in regular physical activity.
5. If you are overweight, focus first on reducing portion sizes.
6. Identify and reduce the fat in your diet, especially saturated and trans fats.
7. Eat more fruits and vegetables.
8. Check your feet daily.
9. Monitor blood glucose levels regularly.
10. Stay educated about diabetes.

Given your own circumstances, you and your doctor might rearrange these priorities or even include a few different items. For example, if you have type 1 diabetes, you might put blood

glucose monitoring higher on the list. If you are not overweight and your blood glucose is well controlled, you might not worry about reducing portion sizes.

In any case, since no one can do it all, sit down with your doctor and determine your own self-care priorities. Learn which of your many tasks will give you the biggest bang for your buck. You are already putting out plenty of effort, so make sure it counts!

Forecast Associate Editor
William H. Polonsky, PhD,
CDE, is assistant clinical
professor in psychiatry at the
University of California, San
Diego.



Bang For Your Buck

By William H. Polonsky,
PhD, CDE