Tips for Maintaining Good Diabetes Management

by AFRA WILLMORE

Finding the Willpower to Keep up With Good Diabetes Management

In general, I have the willpower of, well… a thing with no willpower. The planned early night often turns into a late one as I get engrossed in a book, film or conversation. And no matter how sternly I speak to myself about not needing any more shoes I inevitably find myself guiltily sneaking in yet another “must have” pair into my already overflowing closet.

But when it comes to diabetes, the consequences of not fulfilling good intentions can be far worse than temporary eye bags or a grumpy bank manager. You could be risking your life, or at best your way of life.

When Do You Make Poor Choices?

There are many reasons why diabetics fail to maintain good blood glucose levels, but I would be willing to wager that most diabetics faced with a poor Hba1c result know in their heart of hearts that they made conscious decisions that led to poor blood glucose management.

Identifying those decisions and the reasons behind them is vital to getting on top of too high or rising sugar levels and maintaining general good health.

I know that I often make poor food choices out of a desire to please other people. If I go to someone’s house and they have made a lovely cake or prepared a “naughty” lunch, I feel I cannot offend or disappoint them and end up eating food I might have avoided at home.

Going out with friends to eat is another danger zone for me. My friends are not naturally healthy eaters – we love indulgent luxury food, which usually features deep-fried, creamy or low-nutrient ingredients.

One of our favorite treats is a full English breakfast which includes processed sausages, high-salt bacon, fried eggs, and buttered toast. The healthiest ingredients are the fiber-rich baked beans, but even they can be high in sugar. The mushrooms and tomatoes that often feature on the plate are usually fried too!

When Do You Make Poor Choices?

I know I could choose the porridge or fruit and yogurt options, but I find it very hard to resist the belly-busting breakfast, especially when my friends are choosing it.

Feeling tired, low, stressed or even happy can also lead to poor food choices. I’m sure I am not alone in being tempted to cheer myself up, or conversely celebrate, with a sticky creamy cake or other indulgent treats.

So I’ve identified a whole load of weak times. What can we do to pull ourselves back from the brink of the potentially fatal cliff of temptation?

Talk to Your Friends and Family

Well, I could ditch all my lovely friends, but that's a bit drastic. Instead, I need to start an honest conversation with them. Much like people trying to lose weight, it's important for your friends and family to understand that you are not dieting short term but making life-long changes to your diet for your health.

Faced with a cake-wielding pal, maybe say "yes please" to a tiny slice. Then, after complimenting their baking, explain that you would LOVE to eat lots more but you are doing your best to keep your diabetes under control. If necessary explain that long-term high blood glucose can lead to high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, blindness and amputation.

No real friend would want to put your health or life at risk, and they will hopefully move the tempting treat out of reach. The same tactic should work if you are out with friends or family members.

With a bit of luck they will remember your explanation from your strong day and help remind and motivate you when you are feeling weaker.

Leave Yourself Reminders

Buy a pretty heart-shaped fridge magnet and put it on the door of your fridge to remind you every time you open the door looking for unwise treats that your heart needs you to be responsible.

And here's an easy fix if you are a cookie cruncher or love potato chips. Either don't buy them at all, or buy brands that package them in small packets, or even lunch-box portion packs. You are far less likely to open six packets than munch your way through a huge family pack.

Have Special Occasions At Home

Save treats for birthdays, anniversaries and other special occasions – you will savor them so much more if they are an occasional indulgence.

But if you are keen to avoid risking your willpower even for a special occasion, why not invite friends to your home and prepare a feast of heart-healthy, diabetic friendly goodies that you can enjoy without fear of long-term repercussions.

It might prove a great opportunity to help educate your loved ones about what you should be eating – and to be honest the benefits of a diabetic-friendly balanced diet is not restricted to diabetics.

Plan Treats

Or you could plan in your naughtier treats. If you know you are highly likely to be offered baked goods at a particular coffee morning or meeting, be extra careful not to overindulge at other times of the week.

Remember crash diets never work, and in the same vein denying yourself all food luxuries forever will make for a long and dull life. Don't try to cut out all treats, as you are doomed to fail.

Mitigate the Effects of Slip Ups

You could build extra exercise in to help negate the effects of a particularly difficult week where your willpower has failed you.

Feeling bad or worried about indulgent holiday meals? Plan post-dinner walks, a daily swim or cycle ride to help keep you on the straight and narrow.

Conclusion

It might be hard to change the habits of a lifetime, but improving blood glucose levels and the knowledge that you could be buying extra years of life should make it all worthwhile.