



HAESSM “How To” Series

Five Health At Every Size® Tips for People with Diabetes **By Jeanette DePatie, Vice President, ASDAH**

Many people who are comfortable with the Health At Every Size® approach to wellness in populations who are “apparently healthy” find this approach much more challenging in the face of disease. And perhaps no other disease triggers fat fear mongering and the “obesity moral panic” in quite the same way as diabetes. Fat and diabetes are associated conditions, meaning that people who are fat are more likely to have diabetes. And people who have diabetes are more likely to be fat. What is unclear is whether there is a causal relationship. Does being fat cause diabetes? Does having diabetes make you fat? And if you are fat and have diabetes can you still follow a Health at Every Size approach to wellness? There is a great deal of argument out there among scientists and health professionals about these questions. So what’s a body to do?

The Health At Every Size approach has a great deal to offer people with diabetes. After all, the Health At Every Size approach encourages us to honor and accept our bodies. And the Health At Every Size approach describes wellness as multi-dimensional, encompassing a number of health factors. Most effective diabetes treatment programs are also multidimensional, focusing on many health behaviors and metrics beyond weight and body composition. With that in mind, we’d like to offer some Health At Every Size tips for people of all sizes who are coping with diabetes.

1. **Know your body.** Not everyone with diabetes has the same experience. Every BODY is different. Spend time learning how your body is reacting to the disease, and don’t assume that your body will respond the same way every day. Follow your doctor’s recommendations for testing and charting your blood glucose levels. Make sure to keep the information in one central place. Learn as much as you can about how YOUR body reacts to the disease in different situations. And be sure to keep up with your medications.
2. **Move your body.** There is overwhelming evidence that regular and moderate exercise can help stabilize your glucose levels even if it doesn’t lead to weight loss. But the key here is moderate exercise. Be careful to listen to your body as you work out. Try to find a form of movement that is enjoyable and feels good to you. After all, if you like it, you’ll be much more likely to stick with it. And if you are having fun it will improve your stress levels rather than adding to them. If you feel like increasing your fitness level, be sure to do so gradually. Try not to increase the duration or intensity of your activity by more than 10 percent per week.

3. **Manage stress.** Stress is hard on everybody, but it can be particularly damaging for people with diabetes. Stress has a direct hormonal effect on the body that can directly alter blood glucose levels. And stress may make it more difficult to follow your treatment plan. Build a support network of positive friends and family to help you cope with the challenges that come with your disease. Try to make time to get a good night's sleep. And try specific relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing and positive thinking exercises. Choose things that make you feel good and make you feel good about yourself.
4. **Love your body.** Diabetes can make you feel like you are at war with your body. But you have to ask yourself, is this a helpful approach? Treatment of this disease may require you spending more time thinking and learning about your body than ever before. If you are miserable, and you hate your body, you may feel less inclined to treat yourself to the little things that will help you improve your health. And self-hatred causes stress—which can be particularly dangerous to people with diabetes. Why not take some of your relaxation time to do a progressive, body-acceptance meditation? Learn to love your body and love taking care of you.
5. **Like your doctor.** As you learn to manage your disease, you'll be spending a fair amount of time with your medical team. Make sure your doctors are people you like and you trust. Be sure you and your doctor can communicate effectively with one another. And if your doctor is obsessed with your weight to the exclusion of other metrics of health, she might not be the doctor for you. An adversarial relationship with your medical team not only makes you less likely to keep appointments, but it also causes stress. Remember, you are the customer. Your doctors may not always agree with you, but they should always treat you with respect.

For more information about the Association for Size Diversity and Health (ASDAH) and the Health at Every Size approach to wellness, please see the ASDAH website at: www.sizediversityandhealth.org.