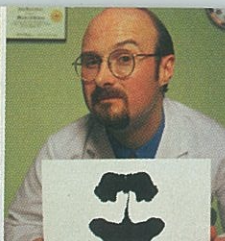
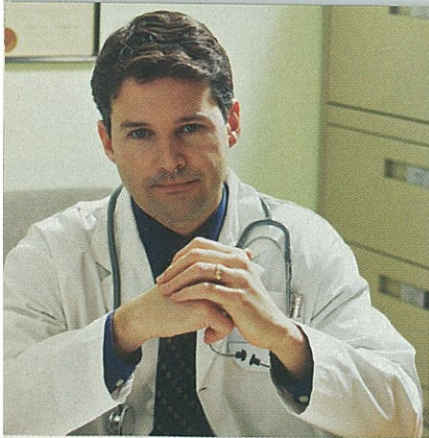


Seeing your primary doctor regularly to keep tabs on your diabetes care is crucial. But to achieve optimum health and stop potentially dangerous diabetes side effects well before they start, you should enlist the assistance of several more health care providers. A group of physicians, nutritionists, counselors, and other health professionals can work in tandem as a team to ensure you achieve the best diabetes control.

by Paula Rasich

Get the
absolute
best care by
enlisting a
group
of health
experts

why you need a diabetes care team



The number of people who kept their LDL or "bad" cholesterol within safe limits doubled when they received team care.



Diabetes impacts your entire lifestyle—the choices you make in your diet, your activity level, and your emotional well-being all can have an influence on your diabetes control. That's why the diabetes care team is so important. The team members coach you in your efforts to achieve a healthy lifestyle, and help you adopt—and maintain—a can-do attitude that will keep you on track for successful diabetes management.

The benefits of a team approach to diabetes care are considerable: In a study of a dozen health clinics in New Mexico, when 1,465 people with diabetes received team care, the number of those who got important eye exams and kept their LDL cholesterol within safe limits doubled. In addition, the number of people who set goals for controlling

betes. Or, your primary physician can be an endocrinologist. However, for most people, it is sufficient to see an endocrinologist only occasionally or even just once soon after being diagnosed.

Regardless of which type of provider you choose to be your primary physician, be sure to seek someone who is knowledgeable about diabetes so that you can be appropriately evaluated and treated. To determine if your doctor provides good diabetes care, see "Get These Answers" on p. 55.

2. Nutritionist or dietitian As you know, a balanced diet is crucial to controlling diabetes. And a nutritionist can give you guidance in developing an eating plan that's right for you and in helping you identify and resolve any problems you have sticking with a healthy diet. It's all

their condition (and the heart risks that go with it) quadrupled.

The team players

Your diabetes care team will consist of experts who are knowledgeable about diabetes from several different points of view, giving you a full spectrum of care. Here are the people you should include.

1. Primary physician

This can be your current primary care doctor or an internist who specializes in dia-

too easy to eat portions that are too large, or to think you're getting all the nutrition you need when you actually aren't. "It's essential to have a review of the kind of food you are eating for nutritional value and portion size," notes Carole Mensing, RN, a certified diabetes educator (CDE), and president of health care and education at the American Diabetes Association (ADA). To find a nutritionist, ask your primary physician or endocrinologist to recommend one. And don't let concerns about cost deter you from seeing a nutritionist—Medicare and private insurance cover some visits.

3. Certified diabetes educator (CDE)

The CDE plays a pivotal role on a diabetes care team and is really more than an educator. A CDE is also a clinician, a program coordinator, and a coordinator of professional community education, according to Mensing. "We play the role of a good case manager," she explains. "CDEs are there to help you sort out strategies and resources and provide a little more comprehensive view." Your CDE will show you how to do glucose testing, record your results, and map out a self-care plan based on your results.

If your doctor's office doesn't have a CDE, ask for a referral. You can also contact the ADA for a local listing of CDEs, or check your phone book or library for local diabetes resources.

4. Mental health counselor Mental health counselors can be a very important part of a diabetes care team. Dealing with the daily demands of diabetes

GET THESE ANSWERS

Here are a few questions to consider asking when you're choosing people for your diabetes care team. Their answers can help you decide if they will provide good diabetes care.

1. How often do you treat people with diabetes/what percentage of your practice? You want someone who has a lot of experience with diabetes patients.

2. How do you stay current on diabetes management? A good team candidate will say they go to conferences, stay on top of the latest diabetes studies, confer with colleagues about new treatments, or regularly read journals related to their discipline (diabetes, nutrition, exercise, etc.).

3. What other professionals do you refer patients to? For example, nutritionists, podiatrists, eye doctors, nurse practitioners, etc. You want to determine that your health care provider has multiple resources in place and that they encourage patients to see those individuals.

4. What diabetes resources such as pamphlets or handouts do you offer?

It's always good to have diabetes (or nutrition, mental health, or exercise) literature readily available. Even if you get a thorough explanation during your visit, it's difficult to retain everything you've been told. Plus, you'll want to have the literature to refer back to.

One important word of caution: Stay clear of experts who are not willing to enlist you as a partner in your care.

JEFF CADGE/IMAGE BANK (PREVIOUS PAGE); PHILIP ROSTRON/MASTERFILE (TOP LEFT); GARY BUSS/TAXI (BOTTOM LEFT); PHIL BANK/STONE (TOP RIGHT)

isn't easy—it can be stressful for even the strongest people. So it's no surprise that research has shown having diabetes doubles your odds of depression. That's why you should pay attention to your emotional well-being in addition to your physical health. To find a good mental health counselor, ask your doctor or CDE to recommend one.

5. Exercise physiologist An exercise physiologist is an optional member of your diabetes care team. If you're generally in good health and have no trouble staying moderately active, you may not need to see an exercise physiologist. But when might you need one? "Seek a personal consultation if you have any limit in your ability such as a heart condition or if you participate in a high-intensity

sport such as marathon running," advises Mensing. How do you locate an exercise physiologist? Ask your doctor or CDE for a recommendation.

Recruiting your team

Now that you know who you need on your team, how do you go about choosing them? Take the following factors into consideration.

Pay attention to the quality of care they provide Does the expert attend to your preferences and needs? Does he ask you questions about what you think or how you feel? If you are not getting the right response from your doctor, shop around for a better match.

Keep the current health care practitioners you're happy with It's important

DO YOU NEED AN Endocrinologist?

It may be useful to have a consultation with an endocrinologist (a doctor who treats hormonal disorders such as diabetes) soon after your diabetes diagnosis, so you can get as much expertise as possible to avoid complications later on. "For people with type 1, it is important to see an endocrinologist at least once. For people with type 2, it depends on the skill level of their doctor and resources," says Eugene Barrett, MD, president of the American Diabetes Association. He adds that part of the value of endocrinologists is the network surrounding them—these doctors have knowledge of, and easy access to, certified diabetes educators, nutritionists, eye doctors, and others. Also, endocrinologists' support staffs are focused on diabetes care so they are very helpful in keeping your care on the right track.

To locate an endocrinologist, ask your doctor—she may be able to recommend one. Or contact organizations such as The Endocrine Society, the Hormone Foundation, and the American Diabetes Association for members in your area that are taking patient referrals.

to have expectations of what you consider to be good care—and to hold onto someone who's meeting those expectations. "If you go to your doctor and you are getting a good level of care, then you don't have to go any further," says Eugene Barrett, MD, president of the ADA. So stick with that doctor as your primary physician. The same holds true if you already have a nutritionist, CDE, mental health counselor, or exercise physiologist you're happy with.

Managing your team

After you have all the people in place and have had your initial consultations with them, here's how to get ongoing benefits from the members of your care team.

Set goals and monitor your progress

Goal setting is a matter of hitting important targets for such things as blood sugar and blood pressure, getting eye exams, and controlling weight to prevent complications. You might want to keep track of these results on your own and share them with a member of your team. "A person with diabetes can follow

up with a member of the team, so they don't necessarily have to see a physician or nurse practitioner," says Mensing.

Stay on top of your appointments "We recommend that people should be seen every 3 or 4 months by their primary doctor for their diabetes care and then annually with a certified diabetes edu-



cator or an American Diabetes Association-sponsored program for an update," says Mensing. Make sure all lab tests, examinations, and routine follow-ups such as foot checks and eye exams are in place. And see your nutritionist, counselor, and exercise physiologist as often as each recommends, or when you have a problem that needs to be addressed.

Get to know the support staff at your doctor's office Take the time to create a personal relationship with the support staff in your doctor's office. They

can be extremely helpful in getting you more time with your doctor or helping you smooth over any rough patches in your care, such as insurance issues, questions you have about your treatment, or when you need a quick answer to a concern.

Paula Rasich is a frequent contributor to *Prevention* magazine.

■ quicktip

A program sponsored by the American Diabetes Association has been reviewed by the ADA for good education. Call your local ADA for a listing of recognized programs in your area.

DEBORAH JAFFE/IMAGE BANK