

When your child was first diagnosed with diabetes, you had a lot to learn. You conquered the finger pricks, the injections, the carb counting. But what about the more unexpected challenges? Here, strategies for coping with jealousy, puberty, independent teens and more.

SQUASH SIBLING RIVALRY

“It’s easy to become all diabetes, all the time,” says Reston, VA, mother of three Beth McNamara, whose oldest son, Rob, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in 2008 at age 12.

All the attention you need to focus on your child with diabetes can create jealousy, fear and guilt among siblings, says Deborah Butler, M.S.W, C.D.E., a licensed social worker at the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston. To stave off negative feelings, check in with your other kids on a regular basis and let them know it’s okay



GROWING PAINS:
Hormone shifts and growth spurts in tweens and teens can wreak havoc on glucose levels

By Lindsey Konkel

Parents’ Guide to Diabetes



to feel angry or scared. Ask questions, such as, “How are you feeling about your brother’s condition? Anything you want to talk about?”

“Siblings need to feel included and know that their feelings are important,” says Butler. To this end, ask them to help with age-appropriate diabetes tasks. McNamara encourages her middle son, Jeremy, now 13, to pitch in at local diabetes

events. “He had a great time helping plan a bowling outing for all the families,” she says. If problems continue, meet with a psychologist or social worker to help you work through family issues as they arise.

FEND OFF FOOD FIGHTS

After McNamara’s son was diagnosed, her youngest, Duncan, a first-grader at

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the time, was upset because he thought the family would never eat ice cream again. To reduce tension over treats, Butler suggests keeping few sweets in the house, but making a weekly family outing to your favorite dessert spot. “A child with diabetes can still have dessert occasionally. It just takes additional planning,” she says.

BUST BURNOUT

Caring for a family while managing your child’s diabetes can be exhausting. And if you’re feeling worn out, the whole family will feel the impact. “Don’t do it alone,” says Butler. In a two-parent family, trade off tasks. If you keep track of blood glucose readings, medications and doctors’ appointments, have your partner run errands, make lunches or drop the kids off at sports practice.

In addition, teach close friends and family the basics of your child’s diabetes care. This will give you the freedom to put someone else in charge while you get away for a couple of hours from time to time to take care of yourself.

PREPARE FOR CHANGE

While diabetes can occur at any age—sometimes in children as young as one or two—most kids with diabetes are diagnosed shortly before puberty. The resulting growth spurts, hormone changes and menstrual periods of the early teen years can make blood glucose readings shoot up and down. Even stress can play a role. When McNamara’s son’s blood sugar kept spiking last year, she initially suspected he was sneaking cookies. He wasn’t. His



SCORE POINTS: Seek out local events for tweens and teens with diabetes to expand your child’s support system

blood sugar shifts were actually due to math class worries.

With all this physical and emotional upheaval, your tween’s or teen’s medications and diet may need tweaking. So, now more than ever it’s important to keep diligent records and meet with your child’s doctor at least every three months, says Larry Deeb, M.D., a pediatric diabetes doctor at Florida State University in Tallahassee. See the doctor sooner if your child’s blood sugar spikes above 250 mg/



DIABETES & DRIVING

Make sure your newly minted driver ...

- ▶ Checks her numbers before getting behind the wheel, and only drives when levels are on target.
- ▶ Pulls over to treat low blood glucose levels and waits 15 minutes to recheck before driving again.
- ▶ Stocks the car with fast-acting sugars and diabetes supplies.
- ▶ Knows what to do if she has a diabetes emergency while driving.

dL, she's having trouble knowing when her blood sugar is low or if you have other concerns about her well-being.

DIVIDE RESPONSIBILITIES

Your teen may seem ready—and able—to take a more active role in her diabetes management, but adolescents are also wired to feel invincible. “Teens are supposed to feel the need to break away from parents and not worry about their long-term health,” says Butler.

Compromise by splitting up the responsibilities. Perhaps you manage

diabetes care tasks in the home or in your teen's logbook, while she handles everything outside the house.

Set up a simple way to stay connected. For example, “When your teen is out to dinner with friends, have her text you what she's eating,” suggests Vandana Sheth, R.D., a certified diabetes educator in Los Angeles.

Texting is a great way to stay involved with your teen's overall diabetes care plan, while still allowing him some independence, says McNamara. For example, last summer when son Rob was away from home for a week at camp, she checked with him regularly via text messages to make sure his blood glucose readings were on target.

BUILD SUPPORT

As kids grow and change, the family's need for diabetes support shifts too. Diabetes camps are an excellent place for youngsters to start building their own support networks. Local support groups, for teens and tweens, are also a help. Check with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation or the American Diabetes Association for camps and groups in your area.

Also, ask about the availability of teen counselors. “A young adult mentor can be a role model and relate to what your teen is going through,” says McNamara.



GET CONNECTED! HealthCentral.com's Beth McNamara is raising three sons, one with type 1 diabetes, so she knows your challenges. “Don't beat yourself—or your kid—up too much if the numbers aren't right every time,” she says. Connect with Beth at HealthCentral.com/f/diabetesmom.