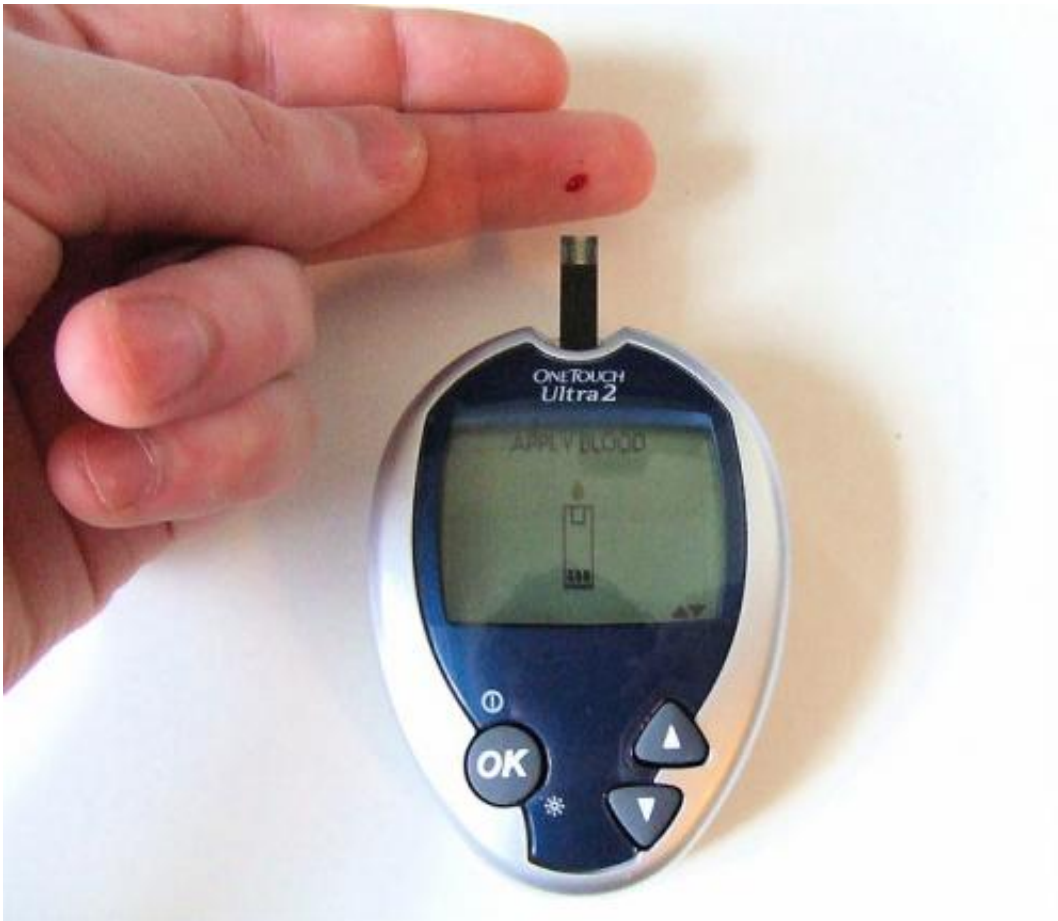


Expert offers tips on how to manage diabetes during the holidays

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Blood glucose monitoring. Credit: Wikipedia

For many people, November serves as the beginning of the holiday season and with it comes lots of good food, from turkey to pies.

However, November also is Diabetes Awareness Month, and one Baylor College of Medicine expert offers tips on how to manage diabetes throughout the holiday season.

"One issue with treating diabetes is that lifestyle plays such an incredibly important role in managing it, and the second issue is that it requires a lifelong lifestyle change. Diabetes management is not something you can do for a few weeks and stop," said Dr. Ashok Balasubramanyam, professor in the department of medicine in the division of diabetes, endocrinology and metabolism at Baylor. "You can't take a few days off during the week, and you can't take months off during the year when you're dealing with diabetes."

Because managing diabetes requires consistency, it can be very tough during the holidays, he said.

"The trouble with the [holiday season](#) is that it lasts for a long period of time. It starts around Halloween, goes through Thanksgiving and then lasts until the new year," said Balasubramanyam who also is vice president for academic integration at Baylor and senior associate dean for academic affairs. "In between, there are all sorts of sweets laying around to snack on. There's also a lot of going out to eat. Your office has a party, then your spouse's office has a party, and your friends have a party. Essentially, people with diabetes are taking a six to seven week break from properly managing their diabetes because they're not noticing this behavioral change."

Balasubramanyam explained that this has a huge effect because the number of calories consumed tends to go up and the amount of exercise tends to go down. He also warned that the increase in alcohol consumption becomes an issue because alcohol introduces extra calories.

However, Balasubramanyam does offer some tips to those living with

[diabetes](#) so that they can enjoy those holiday meals while still maintaining their health.

"You have to pace yourself and increase certain kinds of calories by eating more turkey and vegetables but decreasing the fatty, high-calorie items. Also, you should check your sugar levels more often," he said.

According to Balasubramanyam, if you are on insulin and you check your sugar levels regularly, then you can adjust your insulin to the amount of anticipated increase in your calories. However, he warned that this does not mean you can eat twice as much and then just take twice as much insulin.

He said it also can be helpful to preplan your meal and prepare your foods in healthier ways.

"Part of the problem is that we are so caught up in preparing our meals in the traditional ways. For example, the turkey has to be cooked a certain way or we have to put a whole stick of butter and cream in the casserole, but there are many healthier alternatives. You can prevent raising carbohydrates to the highest extent by not putting a high-calorie glaze on your turkey and by limiting the number of sweets and pies you put on the table."

Lastly, Balasubramanyam recommends exercising regularly.

"Exercise can greatly decrease the amount of insulin you need if you're on it. It may also decrease the dose of other diabetic medications you take, as well as improve what is called 'insulin sensitivity.' However, you have to exercise daily to reap these benefits," he said. "For the holiday season, I would try to make sure you're fitting in your exercise routine around all of the holiday activities you're participating in."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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