

Q&A: Reducing teen's risk of diabetes

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I am a 40-year-old overweight woman diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes a little over a year ago. I have become more mindful about the food our family eats, limiting sugar and incorporating more fruits and vegetables into meals at home. Recently, though, I learned my 14-year-old daughter has been "snacking" on spoons of granulated sugar daily. What can I do

to reduce her risk for diabetes and reduce her addiction to sugar?

ANSWER: Adherence to a [strict diet](#) can be challenging, regardless of the reason. While the road may be bumpy, you should be proud of your efforts to manage your illness and set a good example for your family to be more healthful.

Having received a diagnosis of [diabetes](#) certainly makes you more aware of [sugar](#), but ingesting a lot of sugar will not directly cause a diagnosis of diabetes.

The body uses sugar as fuel and diabetes is a condition where the body has trouble managing [blood sugar levels](#). Type 2 diabetes happens because there is a breakdown in how the body regulates and uses sugar.

When we have sugar in the bloodstream, insulin typically is released from the pancreas to help break down the sugar and carry it to the cells in our body.

In Type 2 diabetes, there is a breakdown in the process. Instead of moving into the cells, sugar builds up in the blood. As [blood sugar](#) levels rise, the pancreas releases more insulin. Eventually, the cells in the pancreas that make insulin become damaged and can't make enough insulin to meet the body's needs.

If you have not shared with your daughter your diagnosis, she may not be aware of why you have made dietary changes. Start by telling her what Type 2 diabetes is and the importance of healthy food choices.

Also, talk with her about her risk of developing the condition. The main risk for developing Type 2 diabetes is being overweight. Being inactive and having a [family history](#) also elevates her risk.

Here are some strategies to help your daughter overcome her sugar addiction:

- Encourage your daughter to join you in making better choices and get her involved by asking her to help plan menus, go grocery shopping with you or cook.
- Identify healthier alternatives to satisfy her sweet tooth. Swap [sugary snacks](#) for things like fresh fruits, yogurt or nuts. And don't forget to mix and match—such as a bowl of fresh berries with a piece of dark chocolate, or a cup of plain yogurt with a drizzle of honey and sprinkle of cinnamon on top.
- Gradually reduce the amount of sugar in recipes when baking or cooking. Experiment with alternatives like honey or maple syrup.
- Replace sugary beverages like soda, fruit juices and [energy drinks](#). Keep a supply on hand of tea or naturally flavored water instead.
- Read labels and limit the amount of processed foods you buy. These often contain hidden or excess sugar.
- Make [physical activity](#) a priority. The less active a person is, the greater the risk of diabetes. Physical activity helps control weight, uses up glucose as energy and makes cells more sensitive to insulin. Make family outings more active by walking, hiking or biking together.

As a parent, you are an important role model for your daughter. Continue to show her how to make healthier choices by practicing them yourself. Also, share your experiences and challenges with managing diabetes and emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

It may be helpful to speak to your daughter's pediatrician or health care professional to get a baseline of her blood glucose, weight and cholesterol. They can also be a resource to provide more tailored suggestions. But remember, small, consistent changes, as you have likely

found, are the key to success.

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