

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Type 1 diabetes requires lifelong action

Our 11-year-old son was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. We're learning a lot very quickly. What do we need to be aware of as we settle in to living with diabetes?

The diagnosis of diabetes is always difficult, especially when it's type 1. With type 2 diabetes, in which the pancreas still produces insulin, there's a chance that diet, exercise and oral medications can help the body use the insulin it makes to control the amount of glucose in the bloodstream, allowing it to be used for energy.

With type 1 diabetes, which accounts for 5 to 10 percent of diabetes cases, the pancreas produces little to no insulin, causing blood glucose to reach dangerously high levels. In addition to taking a prescribed amount of "basal" or long-acting insulin every day, you have to also take additional insulin whenever you eat to prevent blood glucose from staying in the bloodstream for too long.

It's like being forced to learn to drive a car with a manual transmission overnight when all you've ever known is an automatic, with serious physical consequences if you don't get it right. That's a lot to put on a kid. Or a parent.

While complications of diabetes can be serious, including blindness, kidney or nerve damage, and heart and blood vessel disease, the risks significantly drop with good blood sugar control.

Years ago, children with diabetes were told they needed to eliminate sugar from their diet. Today, the medical community realizes that all sugars and starches affect blood sugar and can be part of a diet well-balanced with proteins and fats. To stay on track, your son needs to frequently monitor his blood sugar and take insulin.

Here's some advice for parents of children with



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diabetes from the American Diabetes Association, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:

- Work closely with your son's healthcare providers. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Be honest with your health care team especially regarding how the diabetes is impacting your finances, your relationships, or other areas.
- Find books, support groups, websites and other resources on type 1 diabetes. For example, the ADA offers diabetes camps that many kids find rewarding. It helps to learn from others' experiences, but remember, your medical team is the first authority for your son's care.
- Talk about the diagnosis with your son's teachers and other adults in his life. Don't assume they know much about diabetes or the difference between type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Emphasize how important it is for him to monitor his blood glucose and give himself insulin, and make sure he has the time and privacy to do so.
- Understand that if you're like most people, this diagnosis can seem overwhelming. Have patience and know you'll always keep learning and finding new ways to help your son live with diabetes.

Additional helpful information is available at diabetes.org and childrenwithdiabetes.com.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Dan Remley, Ohio State University Extension field specialist in Food, Nutrition and Wellness.

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