



# Diabetes Education Can Prevent Complications

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**A**s we know, being overweight can lead to several other conditions that jeopardize overall health, and one of the most serious risks is that of developing diabetes.

Many understand diabetes to be a condition in which blood sugar needs to be regulated. But, few recognize the intense burden that this condition places on patients who need to carefully analyze their every meal, their lifestyle, and their habits, as well as their blood sugar levels.

However, a lesser-known specialty within healthcare is the field of diabetes education, which has been proven to prevent the major complications that arise from diabetes, including heart disease and stroke, kidney disease, vision loss and even amputations of the lower extremities.

## What is diabetes education? Here are several things you may not know:

Diabetes education (also known as diabetes self-management training or DSMT) is a covered Medicare benefit and is also covered by many private insurers. However, many people with diabetes do not know about it or know how to take advantage of it.

Diabetes education provides critical knowledge and skills training to patients with diabetes, helping them to identify barriers to wellness, facilitate problem solving, and develop coping skills to effectively manage their diabetes and related chronic conditions.

**Diabetes education clearly prevents or delays complications and reduces the burden on the healthcare system:**

- Nearly two-thirds of people diagnosed with type 2 diabetes are not able to successfully manage the condition, and are exceeding the recommended glucose levels.
- And yet, diabetes education is far under-utilized; according to recent research from the American Association of Diabetes Educators, roughly 8.5 million Americans covered by Medicare have diabetes. Of those, only 58,000 – less than 1 percent – received the service.

Diabetes education is provided by healthcare professionals who are already licensed in another healthcare specialty and now specialize in diabetes. They are often registered nurses

and nurse practitioners, registered dietitians and pharmacists. Many also carry the additional credential, Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) or Board Certified Advanced Diabetes Manager (BC-ADM).

In 2009, the American Association of Diabetes Educators first presented the results of a study, which was among the first to state with statistical certainty that diabetes education reduces health care costs and improves public health.

An update to the study demonstrated that ongoing diabetes education beyond the first year continues to yield benefits, and it bolsters the argument for additional reimbursement by Medicare and private insurers for diabetes education. Currently, Medicare pays for one hour of individual education and nine hours of group education in the first year; and two hours of group education in each of the following years.

In practical terms, professionally qualified diabetes educators teach individuals with diabetes the essential tools needed to manage their condition: monitoring blood glucose levels, taking medications as prescribed, and learning how to problem solve and cope with specific diabetes-related emotional and physical challenges. They also work with their patients to achieve weight loss through adoption of a healthy eating plan that reflects personal tastes and cultural background, and by helping them fit more physical activity into their lives.

In order to see a diabetes educator, patients can ask their doctor for a referral. If the doctor does not know of any diabetes educators, they can visit [www.diabeteseducator.org/find](http://www.diabeteseducator.org/find) to locate one. There may be a co-pay, but it will be small, particularly when compared to the health benefits they will receive.

Diabetes education should also result in weight loss, as many of the tenets include lifestyle modification, exercise and a healthy diet.

But, for those who have recently been diagnosed with diabetes, diabetes education is a proven, effective strategy to dealing with a complicated and difficult-to-manage condition.

For more information about the American Association of Diabetes Educators, please visit [diabeteseducator.org](http://diabeteseducator.org) •