

Diabetes Self-Care Guide



**Your personal guide
what you do each day really matters**



**WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
of HEALTH SERVICES**

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How to use this guide

You have diabetes. Now what?

It's completely natural to feel overwhelmed maybe even scared, angry or in denial. You might also have a sense of relief just to have an explanation for what you've been experiencing. At the same time, there could be moments of shame or uncertainty, wondering why me? It can feel like there is a lot to navigate, questions keep piling up. You're not alone if you're unsure where to begin or who to ask.

The good news is, you don't have to figure it all out at once, you don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to do it alone. While no one's diabetes diagnosis and treatment plan are the same, the information in this booklet may help you connect to the resources to successfully manage your diabetes.



Aside from the support of family and friends, it's important to build a team of dedicated health care professionals who can guide you in managing the challenges of diabetes and help you celebrate your successes. Your health care team or care team may include doctors, dentists, dietitians, educators, pharmacists, exercise experts, mental health professionals, community health workers, and more. These professionals can provide you information, advice, care coordination, and emotional support; while helping you make informed choices, stay motivated, and maintain a healthy lifestyle.



Working with your care team is important. Use this booklet when you meet with them. It can help you:

- Know what to ask at your visits.
- Learn how to care for your diabetes.
- Help you keep track of your important diabetes-related information.

This guide offers basic information about diabetes and is best suited for individuals aged 16 or older who have a general



understanding of diabetes. This guide is not intended to replace medical visits with your doctor, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other members of your health care team.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes changes the way the body uses the food you eat. The body turns food into glucose (sugar) and uses this glucose for energy. To use glucose from food for energy, the body needs insulin.

Insulin is a hormone that helps move glucose from the blood into the body's cells. When glucose is higher

than normal—a standard measure determined by the medical profession—and left unmanaged over time, it can damage blood vessels and nerves impacting the eyes, heart, kidneys, digestive system, and feet. While diabetes is a condition that never goes away, it can be managed.

Type 1 diabetes

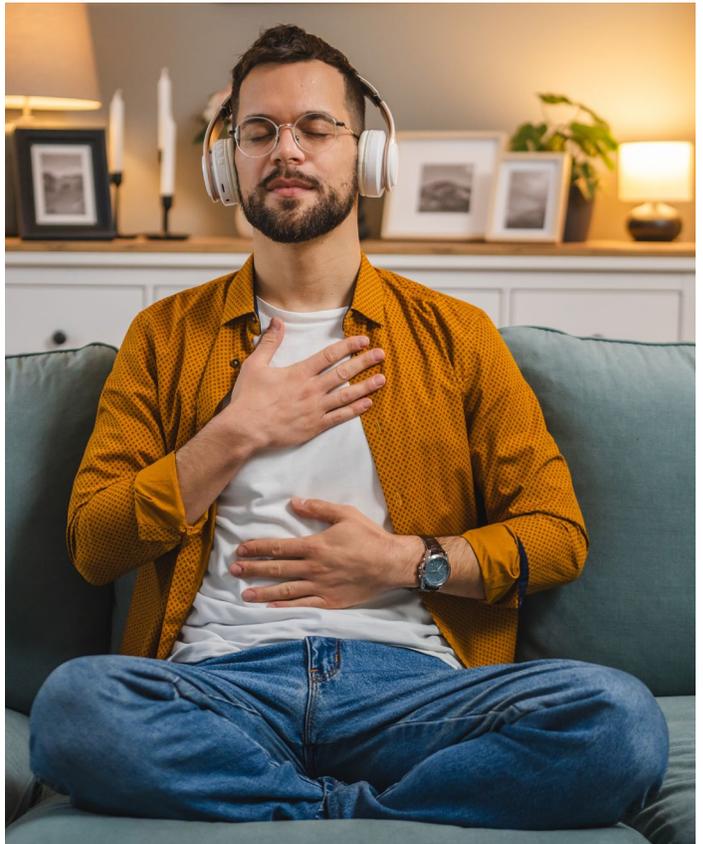
With type 1 diabetes, the body cannot make insulin on its own. A person who has type 1 diabetes needs to use insulin. Although type 1 diabetes is more commonly diagnosed at younger ages, it can happen at any age.

Type 2 diabetes

With type 2 diabetes, the body makes some insulin but not enough, or the body is not able to use insulin as it should. Medication and insulin may be needed to be healthy. While a type 2 diabetes diagnosis have been typically found in older adults, medical professionals are seeing a growing number of cases among younger people, including children.

What is diabetes self-care?

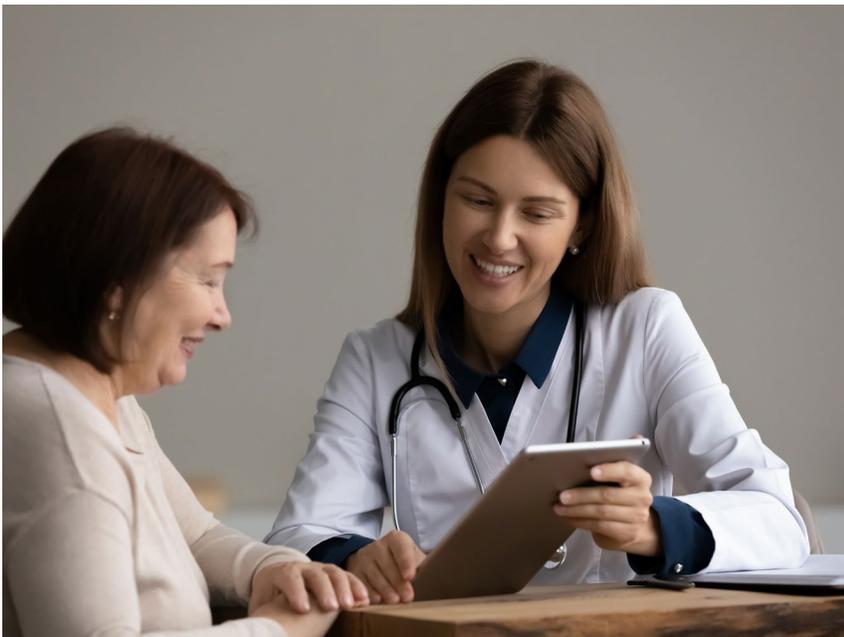
You are the most important person when it comes to taking care of your diabetes. Managing diabetes is not the same for everyone. Self-care practices help you learn how to manage your diabetes, feel good, and stay healthy.



Your self-care practice may include:

- Working with your health care team to manage your care.
- Filling your prescriptions and taking your medications as directed.
- Monitoring your blood sugar at home and knowing your target numbers.
- Scheduling regular checkups and staying up to date on vaccines.
- Maintaining regularly scheduled eye exams and dental cleanings.
- Getting emotional support if you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed.
- Eating a nutritious, balanced diet.
- Participating in regular physical activity.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Checking your feet daily for cuts, blisters, or signs of infection.
- Wearing a medical identification bracelet or necklace.
- Focusing on progress—not perfection. Setbacks happen, but don't give up.

Diabetes information and care can be hard to understand. Your health care team wants you to be successful. Do not hesitate to ask questions or discuss your concerns. Be sure to tell your health care team if you are having problems with any treatment.



Who is on your health care team?

Many people can help you live healthfully with diabetes. Working together with your health care team you'll learn about how to best manage your diabetes with healthy eating, being active, taking medication, and being an advocate for yourself.

We've included some suggested health care team members in the following list, please note that some organizations may use slightly different titles. Don't hesitate to ask for clarification.

Title	Name	Phone number
Case or care manager		
Primary care doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant (may have the designation of MD, DO, NP, PA-C)		
Endocrinologist or diabetes doctor		
Nurse (may have the designation of RN)		
Certified diabetes care and education specialist (may have the designation of CDCES)		
Community health worker (may have the designation of CHW)		
Pharmacist		
Dentist		
Eye doctor		
Foot doctor		
Health educator or certified health education specialist (may have the designation of CHES)		
Mental health professional		
Registered dietitian nutritionist (may have the designation of RD or RDN)		
Exercise specialist or physical therapist (may have the designation of PT)		
Social worker (may have the designation of CSW)		
Other:		

Ask questions

Whenever you ask questions, you and your health care team learn more about each other. Together you can decide on the best ways to care for your diabetes.

Here are some general questions you may want to ask:

- How can I learn more about diabetes, eating healthy, and being active?
- How can my family, friends, or others in my community help me with my diabetes?
- Am I on the right medication for me based on my weight, my kidney tests, and my heart history?
- What if I cannot afford my medication or other diabetes supplies or services?

Some other more specific questions for your health care team, pharmacist, or health plan (insurance) might include:

- How can I find budget-friendly options, like medication and diabetes supply assistance programs?
- What online or smartphone-based tools can help me manage my diabetes?
- Is a continuous glucose monitor (CGM) an option for me?
- Do I need to use a glucose meter as a backup for my CGM?
- Would a connected insulin pen help me with my insulin injections?
- Could I deliver my insulin using an insulin pump?
- If I am taking insulin or at high risk for hypoglycemia (very low blood sugar), should I have glucagon ordered for me? (Glucagon is used in an emergency when glucose is very low.)
- What does my health plan or insurance cover?
 - ◆ Call your health plan to understand what benefits are available to you to help you manage your diabetes.
 - ◆ If you do not know what your health plan is, ask someone on your health care team.
 - ◆ If you do not have a health plan:
 - Visit [WisCovered.com – Wisconsin Health Insurance Resources \(https://wiscovered.com/\)](https://wiscovered.com/).



A health insurance expert can help you find the best affordable plan for you. These experts work at organizations like Covering Wisconsin, community health centers, and other nonprofits and have access to all health insurance options available to Wisconsinites from private insurance to BadgerCare Plus. Health insurance experts don't make money by signing you up for a plan.

- In Milwaukee call 414-488-7746
- In Madison call 608-261-1455
- Anywhere in Wisconsin call 2-1-1

- Contact your county [Aging and Disability Resource Center \(ADRC\)](#) (FindMyADRC.org) or call 844-WIS-ADRC (844-947-2372) for help finding your local ADRC or Tribal ADRS.
- What if I am planning to become pregnant?
It is very important you talk with your health care team **before** becoming pregnant with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. High glucose levels before and when pregnant can increase risk of health problems for you and your baby. Discuss changes in glucose levels and how to adjust diabetes monitoring and medications.
- How can I take steps to quit smoking or using nicotine products? Your health care team may provide specific recommendations. You can call or visit the [Tobacco Quit Line](https://quitline.wisc.edu/) (https://quitline.wisc.edu/) at 800-784-8669 or 800-QUITNOW

Other questions or concerns may be very specific to your life and personal situation. It's important to ask questions and seek the guidance of your health care team.

Be prepared

Things like travel or getting sick can disrupt your routine and make managing diabetes a bit trickier. It's a good idea to have a plan and make sure you have enough supplies to stay on track.

General suggestions:

- Always have your glucose meter and strips or continuous glucose monitor and sensor and treatment for low blood glucose with you.
- Wear a medical ID or carry a wallet card that says you have diabetes.

Low blood sugar treatment

While you might think having low blood sugar is a good thing, it is not. Having a glucose (sugar) level that is too low can be life-threatening. You want to maintain your blood sugar levels within the range directed by your health care team.

Your health care team may have given you specific instructions to treat your low blood sugar that may include the use of glucagon.

If your blood sugar is below 70 mg/dL but above 50 mg/dL, eat 15 grams of a carbohydrate. For example:

- Four ounces or ½ cup of juice or regular soda (not diet)
- One tablespoon of honey or sugar
- Three or four glucose tablets or one tube of glucose gel (available at the pharmacy)

Test your blood sugar again in 15 minutes to see if your level has returned within your recommended range. If it has not, repeat this treatment a second time.



If your blood sugar is below 50 mg/dL, eat 30 grams of carbohydrate. For example:

- Eight ounces or one cup of juice or regular soda (not diet)
- Two tablespoons of honey or sugar
- Six to eight glucose tablets or two tubes of glucose gel

Do not use chocolate bars, cookies, doughnuts, or other desserts. The fat they contain will interfere with quick absorption of sugar your body needs.

If your insulin is delivered using a pump, you may not need to eat as much carbohydrate to treat low blood sugar. Get specific advice and instructions from your health care team about how to treat low blood sugar if you use an insulin pump.

Sick days

The change of your daily routine during sick days means taking a little extra care to manage your blood sugar levels.

Here are some important considerations:

- Check your blood sugar level or review continuous glucose monitor readings more frequently.
- Keep a thermometer on hand and check for fever regularly.
- Have medication available for fever and nausea.
- Drink at least four ounces (½ cup) of water or caffeine-free beverages every 30 minutes.
- Stock up on clear liquid foods with sugar, such as ginger ale, regular clear soda, popsicles, and prepared gelatin desserts.
- Keep emergency phone numbers for your health care team accessible.



Call your health care team when:

- Your glucose (sugar) remains above 300 mg/dl for more than six hours or below 70 mg/dl after repeated treatment.
- Your temperature is over 101 degrees for more than 24 hours.
- You have vomiting and or severe diarrhea for more than six hours.
- You feel dehydrated with a very dry mouth and or cannot urinate after four hours.
- You have lost five pounds or more since becoming sick
- You experience confusion, sleepiness, or seizures.

Travel

Traveling can be a great adventure, but changes in time zones, activity levels, and food choices can all impact your blood sugar levels. By consulting with your care team and making some additional preparations, you can still have a great trip and keep your diabetes managed.

These suggestions may help you travel more easily.

- Bring a travel letter from your doctor's office stating you have diabetes and have them list your medications with dosing instructions and other supplies needed.
- Wear a medical ID bracelet stating you have diabetes.
- Carry a list of your health care team, clinic, and pharmacy names and phone numbers.
- Pack diabetes supplies, insulin, and medication in your carry-on luggage so they are easy for you to access during transit, and that they aren't exposed to temperature extremes.
 - If using insulin or medications that need to stay cool, Frio® cooling products can be an option to use.
 - Sugar Medical® travel bags can be an "extra" carry-on bag that is your medical bag.
- Take double the diabetes supplies you need in case of failure and extra medication in case your trip is unexpectedly extended. You may need to contact the insurance company for an override for the extra prescription allotment.
- Talk with your care team about wearing compression socks to help improve circulation in your legs and avoid blood clots.
- Move around when you can:
 - Take stretch breaks on road trips or walk the aisle of the plane or train when it is safe to move about the cabin.
 - Do leg exercises, like ankle circles, foot lifts, and knee lifts, from the safety of your seat.
- Drink plenty of water to ensure you stay hydrated.
- Carry nutritious food (nuts and fresh fruit) with you to tide you over as mealtimes may change.
- Look for healthy options at airport or roadside restaurants.
- Adjust your treatment plan for changes in time zones.
- Check your feet daily and avoid walking barefoot.



Read the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) publication [Tips for Traveling with Diabetes](https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/about/tips-for-traveling-with-diabetes.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/features/traveling-with-diabetes.html) (https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/about/tips-for-traveling-with-diabetes.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/features/traveling-with-diabetes.html) for additional advice.

Natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and other emergencies

Emergencies can happen at any moment and may impact supplies and services you rely on to manage your diabetes. With a little planning you can be prepared whether you need to evacuate or shelter in place. Aside from your typical emergency supply kit, assemble a diabetes care kit in a waterproof bag or container to be ready at a moment's notice.

- Keep enough nonperishable food and water to last for at least three days.
- Have cash and a charged phone available.
- Carry a list of contacts and phone numbers.
- Keep important information about bank accounts, credit cards, insurance, pharmacy, health care team up-to-date and accessible.
- Have a first aid kit, flashlight, radio, batteries, candles, and matches.

Learn more from the CDC publication [Diabetes Care During Emergencies](https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/articles/diabetes-care-emergencies.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/articles/diabetes-care-emergencies.html>).

Recommended care when you have diabetes

The chart explains general guidelines and goals for health screenings. Your goals—and how often to have these checked—will be determined with your health care team based on your personal needs.

Health screening or test	Goal or target range	How often	Why it matters
A1C	Less than 7% for most people	Every three to six months	Checks blood sugar levels over the last two to three months. When A1C is above normal, the risks for heart, kidney, eye, and foot problems increase.
Blood pressure	Less than 130/80 for most adults	Every visit; at least four times a year	High blood pressure with diabetes greatly increases risk of heart attack, stroke, and kidney damage.
Cholesterol or Lipid panel	Depends on age and health	Once a year	This test measures blood fats. It includes: total cholesterol, LDL—(bad) cholesterol, HDL—(good) cholesterol, and triglycerides. Unhealthy levels increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.
Urine albumin-creatinine ratio (UACR)	30 mg/g or less	Once a year	Over time high blood sugar and blood pressure damage the kidneys. This damage happens long before you have symptoms. This test shows how much protein is leaking from your kidneys.
Estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR)	More than 60	Once a year	This test shows how well your kidneys are working.

Recommended exams and screenings

Talk to a member of your health care team about when to get the following.

Exam	How often?	What happens (during the visit)?
Diabetes visit or exam	Every three to six months	Discuss your plan of care and any questions
Dental exam	At least once a year; up to four times a year with moderate to severe gum disease	Examines mouth, teeth, and gums for disease and decay Cleans teeth, removing tartar and plaque build-up
Mental health or stress screening	Every year	Answer questions on how you feel about your health and diabetes
Eye exam	Every one to two years	Check eyes for changes
Foot exam	Every year	Check feet for changes to skin and loss of feeling
Physical exam	Every year	Looks, feels, and listens to different parts of your body

Vaccinations

Having diabetes increases your risk for other illnesses. If infected, your symptoms may be more severe, and it may take longer for you to recover. Ask someone from your health care team which vaccines are right for you.

Vaccine type	Frequency and age considerations
Flu (Influenza)	Every year for people of all ages
COVID-19	Initial vaccine at age 6 months and older Booster as recommended by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Immunization Program
Pneumococcal (Pneumonia)	Once before age 65 years Booster at age 65 years or older
Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis)	If not vaccinated as a child, any age Tetanus booster once every 10 years
Hepatitis B	Adults under age 60 years; ask health care team if over 60 years If not vaccinated as a child, one set of three vaccines
Zoster (Shingles)	Age 50 years and older Once plus a booster
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)	Age 60 years and older. Once

Speak with your health care provider if other health conditions may change these requirements for you and make note of those recommendations in the chart.

Vaccine	Age	How often?
Flu or influenza		
COVID-19		
Pneumococcal (Pneumonia)		
Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis)		
Hepatitis B		
Zoster or shingles		
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)		

Recommended self-care

Physical activity

Find and choose activities you enjoy.

Goals:

- Aerobic exercise (walking, dancing, biking, etc.): 30 minutes for five days per week. This can be done in short amounts, like 10 minutes three times a day.
- Strength exercise (lifting weights, yoga, Pilates, etc.): 30 minutes on two days per week.

Healthy eating

Choose nutritious meals, snacks, and portions. Healthy eating with diabetes doesn't mean you can't eat foods you enjoy.

- See a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN): three or four visits over a three-to-six-month period and follow-up as recommended.
- Tell your health care team if you have concerns about having enough healthy food to eat.



Mental health and wellness

Taking care of diabetes requires a lot of effort and thought, which can make you feel overwhelmed, run down, and emotionally drained.

- Take time to think about how you feel about diabetes (angry, sad, frustrated, in disbelief, etc.).
- Express your feelings and set goals by journaling.
- Find and talk to your support system like family, friends, and coworkers.
- Talk with your health care team about how you are feeling and consider working with a counselor or other mental health professional.
- Seek out a diabetes support group.

Sleep

Getting enough high-quality sleep can help you have healthy blood sugar levels.

- Practice healthy sleep hygiene—set a regular bedtime and wake time, create a dark, quiet area for sleep, limit caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine in the evening, etc.
- Strive for seven hours of high-quality sleep each night.
- Tell your health care provider if you have trouble falling or staying asleep.
- See a sleep specialist if recommended.



Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support

See a certified diabetes care and education specialist (CDCES) when you are first diagnosed, have three to four follow-up visits in the first six months, and check in at least once a year after that.

Home blood sugar checks

Ask your health care team how often you should check your blood sugar and if your goals are different.

Goals:

- Before meals: 80 to 130 mg/dL
- Two hours after starting to eat a meal: less than 180 mg/dL
- Ask your health care team if you would benefit from using a continuous glucose monitor (CGM). Glucose targets when using a CGM are 70-180 mg/dL



Home blood pressure checks

Goal: Lower than 130/80

Ask your health care team how often you should check your blood pressure and if your goal is different.

Commercial tobacco and vaping

Goal: Quit tobacco or vaping products

Ask your health care team how to quit.

Visit or call [Tobacco Quit Line](https://quitline.wisc.edu/) (<https://quitline.wisc.edu/>) at 800-784-8669 or 800-QUITNOW

Foot care

- Look at your feet daily for changes in skin or loss of feeling.
- Wash feet daily with mild soap and warm water.
- Wear shoes and socks that fit well.
- Avoid walking barefoot.
- Prepare to remove your socks and shoes during your diabetes health appointment.

Local support

When it comes to your health, you know yourself the best. Learn as much as you can about diabetes. Help from your community can include support groups and your library. Check with your health care team to find a diabetes self-management education program in your area. Other trusted resources are listed at the end of this guide.

Personal diabetes care record

A diabetes appointment is different from a visit for a physical exam; both are important.

Dates:

Labs	A1C				
	Cholesterol or Lipid panel				
	Kidney—labs: Urine albumin-creatinine ratio (UACR), Estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR)				
Exams	Blood pressure and weight				
	Dental exam				
	Physical exam				
	Dilated eye exam				
	Foot exam				
	Emotional health				
	Sexual health				
Vaccinations	COVID-19				
	Flu (influenza)				
	Hepatitis B				
	Pneumococcal (Pneumonia)				
	Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)				
	Tdap or Td				
	Zoster (shingles)				
Education	Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support (DSMES)				
	Nutrition				
	Physical activity and exercise				
	Home glucose (sugar) monitoring				

Talk with your health care team

Take the first step. Be an active member of your health care team! Here are some tips for talking with them:

- Make a list of questions, take the list to your visit, and ask the most important question first.
- Take someone with you to each visit to help you remember what was talked about.
- Learn how to message your clinic for non-urgent questions through your electronic health record.
- Discuss the best way for providers to share critical medical records. For example, having your eye exam results from the eye doctor included in your record at the medical clinic.
- Bring a list of all the medication, vitamins, and supplements you take.
- Ask about anything you don't understand.
- Talk about:
 - ◆ Taking any new medications or supplements.
 - ◆ Experiencing changes in your health or life.
 - ◆ Using commercial tobacco or vaping products.
 - ◆ Having enough food to eat.
 - ◆ Having stable housing.
 - ◆ Managing family or caretaking responsibilities.
 - ◆ Having reliable transportation.
 - ◆ Being employed or looking for work.
 - ◆ Feeling safe at home and in your community.
 - ◆ Using drugs or alcohol.



This guide is available in English, Spanish and Hmong in the [DHS Publications Library](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/library/collection/p-43081) (<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/library/collection/p-43081>).

Additional resources

Wisconsin resources

Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC)
www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/index.htm
Call 844-WIS-ADRC (844-947-2372) for help finding your local ADRC or Tribal ADRC.

Community information and referral services
<https://www.211.org/>
Call 211 on telephone or text your ZIP code to 898-211

Diabetes Local
<https://diabetes.org/local/wisconsin>

Healthy Living with Diabetes—Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging
www.wihealthyaging.org
608-243-5690

Medigap Helpline—Medicare Counseling for Wisconsin Residents,
www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/benefit-specialists/medicare-counseling.htm
800-242-1060

National Kidney Foundation of Wisconsin
www.kidneywi.org
414-897-8669

Nutrition and Food Assistance—Wisconsin Department of Health Services
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/nutrition/index.htm>

Prevent Blindness Wisconsin
<https://wisconsin.preventblindness.org/>
414-765-0505

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/diabetes/index.htm

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources—Medical Sharps Disposal
<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/HealthWaste/HouseholdSharps.html>

Wisconsin Immunization Registry
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/immunization/wir.htm>

Wisconsin Lions Club—Diabetes Camps
<https://www.wisconsinlionscamp.com/diabetes-youth/>

Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance
<https://wiscovered.com/>
608-226-3585

Wisconsin Public Libraries
www.publiclibraries.com/state/wisconsin

Tobacco Quit Line
<https://quitline.wisc.edu/>
800-784-8669 or 800-QUITNOW

National resources

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
www.eatright.org
800-877-1600

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org
800-342-2383

American Heart Association
<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/diabetes>
800-242-8721

American Heart Association publication—My Blood Pressure Log
<https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/Health-Topics/High-Blood-Pressure/My-Blood-Pressure-Log.pdf>

Association of Diabetes Care and Education Specialists
www.diabeteseducator.org
800-338-3633

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/diabetes/index.html

Diabetes Food Hub
<https://diabetesfoodhub.org/>

Free diabetes ID necklaces
www.diabeteswellness.net/free-diabetes-id-necklace

Breakthrough T1D
<https://www.breakthrough1d.org/>
800-533-2873

Level One Video Game
This free mobile app game teaches type 1 diabetes management through play.
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/level-one-a-diabetes-game/id6739605694>

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse
www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes

Needy Meds
<https://www.needymeds.org/>

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