

# Age-Related Guidelines for Diabetes Responsibilities

**Each child is different.**

**Age by itself does not tell you when a child is ready for more diabetes responsibility.**

**Most children will want to do tasks that they are ready to do.**

**It is important for them to have a sense of accomplishment.**

## How will my child do depending on how much I let them manage their own diabetes care?

If your child has been given the right amount of responsibility and also the right amount of adult supervision, their knowledge of diabetes should be good, their adherence to their diabetes plan should be good, their blood sugar control should be good, and they should be hospitalized infrequently.

If your child has been given too much responsibility and not enough adult supervision, their adherence to their diabetes plan may be poor, their blood sugar control may be poor, and they may be hospitalized frequently.

If your child has not been given enough responsibility and also has too much adult supervision, their knowledge of diabetes may be poor.

## How do children manage tasks and responsibility?

This depends on their age and developmental stage. It is important to know your child and work with him or her. Your child's ability to manage tasks related to diabetes, can also change at different times in each stage.

## What age should I allow my child to start doing some of the tasks for their diabetes care?

There is not an exact age when children can assume some of their diabetes care either with supervision or on their own. Your child's age is one of the factors to use when making this decision. However, there are several other important factors to think about including:

- Developmental level
- Interest shown by your child and
- Other health issues or concerns

Your child should be encouraged to start helping with their diabetes care when they can follow simple instructions and make simple choices. They can begin self-care as they show they are able to do the tasks for diabetes care correctly and consistently. Continue to help/watch your child. You may have to take over as the parent/caregiver (for example: if they are omitting and/or incorrectly performing diabetes care).

## Why does my child need to have more responsibility?

- Develop self-confidence
- Learn his/her own limitations
- Be prepared for becoming an adult living on his/her own

## What to think about when giving your child more responsibility:

- Your child's **understanding** of diabetes
- Your child's **interest** in having more responsibility
- Your child's **actual performance** of diabetes tasks
- Your child's overall **maturity**



**Teamwork and Shared Responsibility lead to better diabetes control!**

## Less than 5 years old:

- Parent/caregiver do all diabetes care
- Child's job is to cooperate, child accepts diabetes care as part of normal life
- Child can
  - Learn how to help check blood sugar (insert test strip, clean finger)
  - Learn to help with insulin (count to five before taking out syringe/pen)
  - Learn to recognize low blood sugar symptoms



## 6-11 years old:

- Parent begins teaching child how to do more tasks. Gradually learn to cooperate for blood sugar tests and insulin shots
- Gradually learn to recognize hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)
- Adult does all insulin pump management
  - Can do own insulin pump boluses, but may need adult reminders
- Can recognize and treat hypoglycemia
- Can draw and give shots on occasion, but supervision is needed
- Can make food choices and learn to count carbohydrates
- Do not appreciate that good sugar control now helps prevent problems later
- Can be responsible for snacks (if needed), but may need alarm watch or adult reminders
- Parent always supervises and is ready to step in
  - Start making some independent food choices
  - Learning basic carb counting
- It is OK for the child to ask parent to do any diabetes tasks
- Parents can begin teaching child about long and short term complications



## 12-14 years old:

- Parents still watch all tasks and provide guidance in a calm and non-judgmental way and provide guidance as needed
- Can do shots, insulin pump management and blood sugar tests, but still need adult involvement and review to make decisions about dosage changes
- Parent works to limit conflict, helps teen to set goals and problem-solve
- Parents and teens work together to fill out and review the blood sugar log
- Young teens can
  - Begin doing most shots, insulin pump management, and blood sugar checks
  - Count carbs and make appropriate food choices
- Know which foods to eat and can count carbohydrates
- Gradually recognize the importance of good sugar control to prevent later complications
- Some teens may not be ready at this age
- Parents still supervise diabetes care



## 15-18 years old:

- Parents should continue to review the log book, meter, or insulin pump download with teen and provide feedback in a calm and non-judgmental way
- Parent can “fade out” monitoring over time, but should step back in if control worsens and ask teen “What can I do to help?”
- Older teens can
  - Begin doing most tasks independently
  - Be increasingly responsible for communicating with the health care team
- Prepare with parent to transition to an adult healthcare provider
- Some teens may continue to need extra help – give them permission to ask for help

