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Meal Makeovers**

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Health

Why You Need a Team of Health-Care Providers if You Have Type 2 Diabetes



Who's on your diabetes dream team?

(ARTIGA PHOTO/CORBIS)

Type 2 diabetes affects your entire body, from the brain down to the nerves of your feet and everything in between. So when it comes to taking care of your health, you'll need a diabetes health-care team. Here's a list of [10 types of health-care providers](#) who treat diabetes and its complications.

A team of doctors (and the resulting appointments) might sound tedious, but this type of care has been shown to be better than others for treating type 2 diabetes.

What your team can do for you

In one study published in the *American Journal of Medicine* in 1995, people who were hospitalized for diabetes were released 56% more quickly if they had a team of providers rather than just an internist and 35% more quickly than if they were only seeing an endocrinologist.

Team care can do the following.

- Help lower your blood sugar
- Improve your chances of seeing your providers in a timely manner
- Improve your quality of life
- Improve your satisfaction with your care

"When addressing the importance of the team approach with my patients, I use the analogy of the U.S. Olympic Basketball Team—the Dream Team. A team of professionals coming together for one common goal," says Constance Brown-Riggs, RD, a diabetes educator who is author of *Eating Soulfully and Healthfully With Diabetes*.

Quarterback



I'm head of my diabetes team [Read More](#)

"The person with diabetes is the captain, and the primary care physician is the coach of the diabetes dream team," she says. "Other members of the team might include nurses, registered dietitians, exercise physiologists, podiatrists, ophthalmologists, dentists, mental health specialists, and pharmacists."

More on building your diabetes team

One health-care provider should coordinate your care. In general, there are three core members of your team (besides yourself), at least one of whom should be a certified diabetes educator.

- [Why Diabetes Educators Are So Important](#)
- [How Dietitians Can Help You Control Diabetes](#)
- [How to Find Diabetes Support Groups](#)
- [You May Need to Shop Around for the Right Doctor](#)

- A main diabetes health-care provider (usually a physician) who coordinates care with other specialists
- A nurse
- A dietitian

In some cases, an endocrinologist could be your main health-care provider, although primary care physicians, such as [internists or family doctors](#), provide 80% to 95% of diabetes care in America.

What's important is finding a physician who will work *with* you to manage the condition—not just tell you what to do, says Janet Davidson, RN,

director of patient services at the International Diabetes Center at Park Nicollet near Minneapolis.

"No one's going to be living this but the patient, so the patient needs to give feedback as far as what their likes or dislikes are, what the home situation is, their cultural background. All of those things need to go into it so it's really an individualized care plan," she says. "It should be a partnership."

For diabetes there's no one-size-fits-all approach. With many different treatment regimens and many medications to choose from, the best approach for you is the one that best fits your lifestyle and appeals to you, Davidson says. Finding out what that is requires good communication between you and your doctor.

What to do if you need a new doctor

Your current primary care provider [may or may not](#) fit the bill. Your doctor should be someone who really listens to your concerns and answers your questions. You may be able to get recommendations from members of a local diabetes support group.

Be sure a potential doctor is covered under your health insurance plan. Call several doctors' offices and find out a little information about each doctor. An office manager can tell you some basic information about the doctor's background and experience with diabetes before you make an appointment.

When you visit a doctor for the first time, ask these questions.

- How much experience do you have with working with type 2 diabetes patients?
- How often are you in the office?
- Will I have access to any other providers on their staff, such as nurses or other diabetes educators?

If your health insurance limits your choice of doctors and you're not comfortable with the care yours is providing, ask if you can see another doctor in the practice, perhaps one with a different treatment style or more experience in diabetes.

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