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How Am I Going to Remember to Do That?

8 strategies to manage your daily diabetes regimen

BY SUSAN WEINER, MS, RDN, CDCES, FADCES, AND LESLIE JOSEL

Do you feel pressure trying to remember everything you need to do to manage both your busy life and your diabetes? You are not alone! Juggling your daily diabetes to-do list along with home and family responsibilities, plus school and work, can overwhelm even the most organized person. Although life is filled with unexpected distractions, we believe you can create systems and strategies that can help streamline your diabetes management.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Here are eight surefire tips and tools to help get you started.

1. WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

Recognize how you prefer to remember to do things and tap into the practices that work for you. For example, perhaps you like your reminders fun and visual, so leaving yourself colorful notes on your bathroom mirror (e.g., to remember to check your blood sugar or pack your lunch) might work for you. If you are comfortable and familiar with technology and find the alarms and alerts from an insulin pump or continuous glucose monitor (CGM) useful, then timers and smartwatches that also use alarms as reminders may be the way to go. It doesn't matter what your personal style is, as long as it helps to get those memory juices flowing.

PRO TIP: If you spend a good part of your day in front of your computer, set alerts for to-dos on your desktop

calendar. Notifications will pop up on your screen without making any noise, so your work or virtual meetups won't be disrupted.

2. ROUTINE, RITUAL, REPEAT.

The beauty of routines or rituals is that they take away the need to "remember to remember." Think of a routine as something that needs to be planned only once. It provides the ability to move through your tasks without thinking about what's next.

Think about the routines and rituals you already have in place that are working for you. Perhaps you always charge your phone in the kitchen and never forget it since you pass through that room often. Or you leave your diabetes supply bag by the front door, so you literally must step over it to leave your home. If you have a system or routine that is already working for you, pairing it with another task you want to remember may be an easy

way to adopt an additional routine. For example, if you never miss your morning brew, place your oral medications or pill box in your "coffee drawer," and voilà! Every morning you will be presented with a gentle visual reminder to take your medication.

PRO TIP: One of our favorite apps for habit building is The Habit Hub. It's customizable and encourages you to create daily habits by reminding you to perform your tasks and tracking when you complete them. The app creates a visual "chain" when tasks are completed; as the chain gets longer, it serves as an incentive for you to keep at the task so you don't break the chain.

3. PUT THE ITEM FRONT AND CENTER!

If you are prescribed oral medications (or routinely take vitamin and mineral supplements), you can use the bottles or containers as a visual reminder.

Place the bottles where you'll see them at the time of day you have to take them. Turn the bottles upside down when you take them. Then at the end of the day, turn them right-side up again. This will act not only as a visual reminder that you need to take your medications but also as a sign that the task was completed. If you take certain medications twice a day in two different locations, then separate the medications into two containers.

Along similar lines, self-care and grooming items, such as a toothbrush, are typically kept in the same place—on the sink or counter in the bathroom. Keep blood-glucose-checking supplies (except test strips, which can be affected by humidity), dental floss or foot moisturizer (and a makeup mirror so you can self-check the bottom of your feet) nearby so you'll be reminded to perform these essential tasks at the same time as brushing your teeth. This approach is called "checking in pairs" and is a great way to set up a natural and effective routine for self-care.

PRO TIP: Ask your local pharmacy if they can provide you with medicine bottles that have lids with built-in alarms.

4. LEAVE YOURSELF A WRITTEN NOTE.

Sometimes that's all it takes for us to remember to do something. It might be a brightly-colored sticky note on the bathroom mirror to remember to floss, a whiteboard by the front door with a reminder of everything that should be included in your diabetes supply bag (including glucose tablets or other fast-acting sources of carbohydrate to treat low blood sugar), or even a folded index card on the nightstand with a reminder to take evening medicines or perform other nighttime diabetes-related rituals.

PRO TIP: Pin an index card to the outside of your diabetes supply bag listing the contents of the bag, and update it based on daily usage. This way, when you use any of your supplies (glucose tablets or test strips, for example), you'll remember to replace them before you head out the door.

5. USE PHOTO PROMPTS.

Research shows that we remember images more effectively than we do words because our brain has to work a lot harder to process them. This explains why after a while why we stop "seeing" charts and to-do lists. So, try this out-of-the-box idea instead: Have someone take pictures of you moving through your necessary routines. These should be "action shots" of activities such as preparing nutritious meals or making a phone call to schedule a follow-up doctor appointment. Post the photos in the areas of your home where you perform these tasks.

PRO TIP: You can also use photos of the specific items used during each task. So, for example, post a photo of your medicine bottle, dental floss or nonalcohol-based foot moisturizer to serve as a visual cue to perform the tasks using those objects.

6. MAP OUT YOUR SCHEDULE.

First, it's critical to understand the rhythm of your day. Once you understand how your days progress, you'll be able to establish set times to, for instance, check your blood glucose or CGM, take your insulin or medications, and eat meals and snacks.

Once you've mapped out your daily schedule, input those times in your calendar as non-negotiable appointments. Always include your diabetes-related activities in your daily calendar to serve as a reminder and to protect that time. As the rest of your schedule starts to take shape with errands, meetings, appointments, etc., you'll already have time set aside to manage your diabetes. Most smartphones and computers have alerts to remind you 10 to 15 minutes before your preset appointment starts. Sticking to these appointments is critical—giving your diabetes-related tasks and to-dos the same importance as the other focuses in your life is key to successful diabetes management.

PRO TIP: Many pharmacies now offer a month of your medications prepacked—and sorted by dosage and date and time to be taken—at

no extra cost. This is a great way to reduce time spent sorting out medications and reduce countertop clutter.

7. SET ALARMS OR TIMERS.

The beauty of alarms is that they put the responsibility of remembering on something else! Or, in other words, they hold future time, allowing you to free up your brain to be completely in the present. If you are overwhelmed with your daily diabetes to-do list, try using an electronic timer or cellphone alert as a reminder to check your CGM or other monitoring device. (An added benefit of glucose monitoring alerts on a cellphone is that the device can also be used to share the data with others, if need be.) The routine aspect of using these types of reminders helps make these practices habitual and therefore seamless.

PRO TIP: There are a number of free mobile apps that provide medication reminders. Some of our favorites are Pill Reminder—Drugs.com, Mango Health, Med Helper Pill Reminder and Medisafe.

8. WEAR A WATCH WITH A BUILT-IN ALARM FEATURE.

Many medical watches can provide reminders as well as alarms. Websites such as epill.com and Amazon carry a variety of medical watches, including Cadex and Vivalite. These allow you to set alarms multiple times a day.

PRO TIP: Are you looking for a talking clock that can record reminders? Reminder Rosie is a great option and one of our favorite voice-activated alarm clocks. It allows you to record up to 25 reminders a day in your own voice and can be used for both repeated tasks at a specific time and day or one-time reminders. **DSM**

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ALERTS AND REMINDERS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HEARING IMPAIRED

- For iOS, turn on the "LED Flash for Alerts" feature. Go to Settings > Accessibility > Hearing > Audio/Visual. The phone will flash with a bright light when you have a notification (such as a programmed CGM alert).
- For Android, turn on the "Flash Notification." Go to Settings > General > Accessibility > Hearing.
- While sleeping (or when you may not be able to look at your device), wear your smartphone on an armband and enable the vibration feature.

