

# Life



## with diabetes

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International

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### Ask a Medical Professional Diabetes Camp

*By Catherine Marschilok, M.S.N., C.D.E.,  
Board Certified in Advanced Diabetes  
Management*

Few experiences in daily life let children with diabetes feel they are in the majority. Outside of home, they must confront a world that does not always wait for them to check their blood sugar levels or manage their condition. A diabetes camp provides a unique environment, where a supportive community will not only pause for these interruptions, but also nurture confidence in the child's ability to manage his health effectively. Katie Marschilok, a registered nurse and diabetes educator, recalls a summer at a diabetes camp where she witnesses her son taking time out of a ball game to inject himself with insulin, and the ensuing "wordless understanding" from his teammates that makes the camp experience so meaningful.

[Click here to read more](#)

### Ask a Parent Coping with Teen Depression

**Q:** We need help for my daughter, who is severely depressed due to type 1 diabetes. She seems to be stuck in a black hole and can't climb out to function at school, home, or with friends. She's on an anti-depressant and has been to a therapist, but refuses to make friends with other people with diabetes or reach out for support in any way. Any advice?

**A:** Even for healthy adolescents, the teenage years are hard. Teens have to deal with the physical and emotional effects of hormones that are out of whack, plus the stress of school. Add the stress of trying to manage swinging blood sugars and calculating insulin doses, and you've got an emotional rollercoaster. This is a time that can be draining for both you and your daughter. She may at times lash out, be oversensitive, or simply need a shoulder to cry on. Take a breath and try to relax.

[Click here to read more](#)

### Mother's Day

Honor your mom – and help cure type 1 diabetes at the same time. When you make a gift to JDRF in your mom's honor, we'll send her a beautiful e-card for Mother's Day. [Click here to read more](#)

### What's New on the JDRF Website? Blogger Roundtable Series

In March, JDRF kicked off a new [Blogger Roundtable series](#), in which bloggers with type 1 diabetes discuss issues that are important to them. In the first session, they explain how they got into blogging and what being a part of the online diabetes community has meant for them. This month they talk about

their experiences with the insulin pump—seven are currently pumping; two of them have used pumps in the past but eventually decided to go back to injections.

### What a JDRF Chapter Can Do For You Mentor Program

JDRF chapters offer a wide variety of support for families dealing with new diagnosis. Through the Mentor Program, families, individuals, and adults touched by diabetes can get practical advice and emotional support for as long as they need it. When someone in need contacts their local JDRF chapter looking for help, he or she will be put in touch with a trained mentor – someone who has been there. Mentors are there to provide information about diabetes-related services in your local community, to educate the family about what they can do to help find a cure, and just to lend a willing ear and sympathetic heart. The JDRF Mentor Program includes the following services:

- Introduces families with children of similar ages or adults with type 1
- Offers an environment of social support that might not be available from family, friends, or neighbors
- Provides a learning forum exposing members to new channels of diabetes education that complements professional medical treatment

For more information on your local Mentor Program go to the [Locations](#) section of our website and contact your local JDRF chapter.

## Ask a Medical Professional

### Diabetes Camp

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It's neither too early nor too late to think about a diabetes camp for your child this summer. A truly unique experience for those who attend it, diabetes camp might be the only place where children with diabetes are in the majority. To convey what makes the experience so special, I want to share with you a memory of mine from Camp Joslin, 1996.

### Picture this...

*It's a hot sunny day, and there is a group of 10 boys playing pick-up basketball, divided into Shirts and Skins. One member of the Skins team steps out of the game. A member of the opposing Shirt team follows him, picks up his fanny pack at courtside, takes out a blood sugar meter, puts a strip in the meter, holds out a lancet.*

*While Skin pricks his finger, Shirt opens a juice box, knowing it will be needed. They both look at the blood sugar meter, then Shirt hands over his juice box. While Skin sips juice, Shirt opens some peanut butter crackers, gives several to Skin, munches a few himself.*

*Ten minutes pass, then Shirt again gets his meter ready. Skin pricks his finger. Both boys look at the meter reading, and only then is the first word of this entire interaction uttered. Both boys say, "Ready!" then together jump back into game. One of Skin's teammates passes him the ball, Shirt rushes to cover his man, and the game goes on.*

"Skin," as you might have guessed, is my own son, David. Dropping him off for the first time at Camp Joslin at age 8, only four months after his diagnosis, was one of the hardest things my husband and I ever had to do, but it was one of the best. What's so special about diabetes camp is the wordless understanding, the knowledge born of experience that everyone with diabetes has to jump out of the game of life to do some annoying task of taking care of diabetes. At Joslin, and so many other wonderful diabetes camps around the country, the kid with diabetes does not take that step out of the game alone. He steps out with support and a band of brothers behind him. And the player of the game does not worry that he is letting his teammates down, or that once his blood sugar is back up there won't be a place for him in the game.

### What do diabetes camps offer?

As you may have already gathered, diabetes camp, like any other summer camp, is for fun. Kids do the same activities--from rock climbing to team sports to art--as any other camps. In fact, as diabetes camps have become more and more popular over the years, they offer endless options. There are day camps and sleep-away camps, girls- or boys-only camps, family camps, camps specializing in horseback riding, basketball, or scuba diving.

But beyond these activities, diabetes camps are so much more. Because all the other kids and the counselors share this condition (and so may the medical and other staff members), your child will learn she's not the only one with diabetes. Camp is where many kids learn how to give themselves shots for the first time, or use a pump by themselves, or learn the newest technology. If they're newly or recently diagnosed, they will see older campers, counselors, and staff who live happy, healthy, active lives with type 1 diabetes. They will learn they are not alone with diabetes and that there are a lot of other kids just like them. Whatever frustration your child feels about having diabetes and its daily management, it is felt and understood by everyone else. Campers feel free to express their feelings, because there are so many others who have been there, done that, and gone beyond it. These are important and empowering experiences.

A typical day at camp might start at dawn, when everyone wakes up and tests their blood sugars, followed by the day's first insulin dose and a breakfast that fits into their individual meal plan. During the day, blood tests, insulin therapy, and meals are scheduled between activities. Campers' diabetes control often improves while at camp. This happens because activity and meals are scheduled with a flow that helps prevent lows or highs. There's healthy food, with carb counts and serving sizes usually posted for everyone to see. Skilled eyes--including doctors and nurses--are looking at blood sugars and overall health several times a day, and adjustments in insulin doses are made on a daily basis to meet every child's needs.

### How much does it cost?

Most, but not all, diabetes camps cost money. The fees vary depending on the type of camp and how long it lasts. For families who may not be able to afford the fee, there are often scholarships available. Sometimes the camp itself has a payment plan or offers scholarships ("camperships") for a certain number of campers. Otherwise, doctors, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies are also good sources for help.

## How do we find a camp?

To see if there's one that looks right for you, check the web (try <http://www.diabetescamps.org/> or [www.childrenwithdiabetes.com/camps](http://www.childrenwithdiabetes.com/camps)). Remember, you can relax knowing your child is in a safe environment. If you have questions about any aspect of a camp you are considering, have an open, honest discussion with camp staff before you sign up.

## Friends for life

Camp can also set the stage for long-term friendships that can make a difference later in life. I have three very close friends, Jay, Paul, and Joe, who enjoy a special friendship forged over 40 years ago during their summers at camp. When his parents wanted to send him away to a special diabetes camp, Paul remembers that he had no idea why. "I didn't want diabetes to be my specialty," But he had such a good time that he ended up managing the camp himself many years later. "My goal was to give them what I got--the skills and the emotional support to take away and use anywhere for the rest of your life," he says. Joe says, "These friendships have been a source of courage, strength and inspiration all my life, and I might add that it gave my parents a much-needed break!" I'm sure it's no coincidence that all three are living happy, healthy lives with diabetes. They'll tell you they had fun, tried things for the first time they might have at any camp, but more importantly they made lifelong friendships and learned how to win at their most important game: life with diabetes.

## Ask a Parent

### Help from JDRF's Online Diabetes Support Team

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I think I know what you're going through. My son, who's been on the pump for ten years, is now almost 21, a junior in college, and an active football player. From the outside, everything seems great. However, we definitely went through the dark teen years – trust me. There were times when I witnessed his usually-low 6.0 A1Cs jump to 9.0 because he felt that it wasn't "that important" to test so often. In order to keep him in check, I sometimes felt like I was acting like more of a dictator than a parent, and that wasn't fun at all, for either of us. We both had to learn how to adjust.

I'm sure you know that it takes the support of people around you to get through most of the obstacles we face in life. The same is true for your daughter. That she has been seeing a therapist is

great. She may also benefit from talking to a close friend or a friend's parent. Even a teacher or school nurse could help. You should also talk to your daughter's doctor about what she's going through. Find that person who can reach out to her and enlist his or her help in talking to her. Sometimes, it's hard for us as parents to accept that our kids don't always want our advice or to confide in us. Teens especially may sometimes be withdrawn and isolate themselves; the best thing you can do for your daughter at this time is be concerned but avoid prying. Instead, offer your love, emotional support, and understanding.

Try to sit and talk with your daughter. Let her know that she can come to you any time with any problem she has. Get her engaged in doing the things she loves, whether sports, music, art, or writing. Offer to take her to a concert, or encourage her to keep an online blog. Find out what she loves, and have her channel that passion into creating a comfort zone for herself. Let her forget that she has diabetes for a little while and just relax and have fun, like a normal teenager. There is one thing that all kids want – to fit in, and to be just like everyone else, without having to worry that their differences may set them apart from the crowd.

Teens sometimes think that we, as parents, are the most bumbling, ridiculous people to ever walk the earth. When we nag and yell, they tune us out, and we can't always get our point across. That doesn't mean that they don't need us though. You are a vital resource to your daughter, so be her number one advocate. Keep the lines of communication open. Try to nag less, and listen more. There was once a time when I badgered my son constantly to test his sugars – I was nervous, like any normal parent would be. But the more I pestered him, the more he pulled away. This was getting us nowhere, so we decided to compromise. I'd do small things, like leave him little notes saying, "Test, I love you." He let me be a mom, and I let him be a kid. And that worked for us.

Lastly, you can always count on me to help. I'd be happy to write to your daughter; if she needs someone her age to relate to, my son would be more than willing to help. If she'd like an online pen pal, just send her our way. And if you ever need to vent to someone who understands, drop me a line.

*Have a question? Go to the JDRF Online Diabetes Support Team at [www.jdrf.org/diabetessupport](http://www.jdrf.org/diabetessupport)*