

FALL INTO A ROUTINE: TIPS FOR WORK & SCHOOL

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Working From Home

Your blueprint for staying healthy and productive

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

Are you someone who's living with diabetes and working from home? If so, it's essential to learn how to stay organized and manage your time in order to be efficient and successful at your job and best manage your diabetes. Building routines and habits may help improve your daily diabetes care and significantly increase your workflow and productivity. Where to begin? We have you covered! Here are six of our no-fail tips and strategies to help you manage your diabetes while working from home.

1. Map out your schedule.

First, it's critical to understand the rhythm of your day. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your schedule predictable? Or does it change daily?
- Do you have regularly scheduled online meetings, virtual appointments or phone calls?
- Are parts of your day more routine than others? (A daily morning team meeting, for example.)
- Do you eat your meals and snacks around the same time each day?

Once you understand how your workdays progress, you'll be able to establish set times to check your blood glucose (blood sugar) or check your continuous glucose monitor (CGM), take your insulin or medications, and eat meals and snacks. If your workdays are predictable, these times will be fairly repetitive and will likely be about the same time each day. If your workdays vary, scheduling will take a bit more effort.

We spoke to Toby Smithson, RDN, CDCES, owner of DiabetesEveryDay.com, about managing her type 1 diabetes while working from home as a coach for a digital health company. According to Smithson, "My diabetes management schedule is a priority. I block my work breaks at mealtimes to stay on a healthy eating schedule, stock my kitchen with nutritious and tasty food choices, and plan out meals for the week, so we have the foods we need at the ready. I switched to a Dexcom CGM, which makes it much easier to keep a close eye on my readings. Now I can easily check my blood glucose without interrupting a conver-

sation. Sometimes I need to address a low or high blood sugar. Although it is a disruption, it's a self-care necessity."

Just like Smithson says, skipping meals and snacks may lead to hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, while working. Always try to check your blood sugar and eat as planned.

QUICK TIP

Make sure to factor in home-related or outside distractions. Stay acutely aware of scheduled home-maintenance appointments, repair work or deliveries that might interfere with your work or self-care needs. While working from home tends to give you flexibility, it also allows for more blurred lines. Make sure you have the proper boundaries in place.

2. Treat your diabetes-related activities as appointments.

Once you've mapped out your daily schedule and figured out the best times to check your blood glucose, eat, take medications, etc., input those times in your calendar as non-negotiable appointments. While diabetes is often unpredictable, it's helpful to include your planned 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 meetings and appointments, you'll already have time set aside to manage your diabetes. Most smartphones and computers have alerts that can remind you 10 to 15 minutes before your appointment starts. Make sure to learn how to set these important reminders.

This step is critical. Give your diabetes-related tasks the same importance as your team meetings, work-to-do list or client conference calls. This is key for improved diabetes management while working from home.

Here's an example: Let's say that your calendar has an entry to check your blood sugar at 11 a.m. If your boss asks you to participate in a conference call at 11 a.m., you'll see the "Check Blood Sugar" entry and be reminded to make sure you check before the call. Now think about the same situation where you hadn't entered the time. Your calendar shows

a conference call at 11 a.m. for which you need to prepare. Your morning is busy, but you get everything finished for the call. However, the call runs over an hour, and toward the end you become unfocused, lightheaded and miss key parts of the discussion. Just then, you realize you never checked your blood sugar, which you should have done about an hour before. Had your calendar said "Check Blood Sugar" at 11, you would have included that as one of the non-negotiable tasks to get completed prior to the call and could have potentially avoided an out-of-range blood sugar.

Smithson shares, "Recently, I had an aha moment of how to plan my insulin dosing more accurately. I only have a 30-minute break for lunch. Since I have type 1 diabetes and use an insulin pump with rapid-acting insulin, I realized I shouldn't be waiting until 'lunch break time' to check my blood sugar and bolus for my meal. Instead, I have been checking my blood sugar 10 to 15 minutes before lunch break, so I can bolus and be ready to eat my lunch at lunchtime."

We also spoke to Julie Bestry, certified professional organizer, speaker and author, about managing her type 2 diabetes while working from home. She had this to add: "Most of my health-related tasks [that are] built into my schedule are second nature to me now. I have a timer on my Fitbit set to 50 minutes past the hour to remind me to get up and walk at least 250 steps before the hour is up. I also have a weekly Fitbit "Workweek Hustle" challenge with my best friend from college, where we cheer each other on to get 10,000 steps a day, Monday through Friday."

QUICK TIP

Do you have limited input over your work schedule? Time to bring your boss on board. Explain what you need and when. Keep it simple and direct. If you are feeling unsure of how to communicate, ask your doctor, diabetes care and education specialist, or a person with diabetes in a peer-support community to provide some guidance.

3. Build “time padding” around your activities.

While it is sometimes difficult, try not to stack meetings and appointments one on top of another. Invariably, things run over, and schedules get out-of-whack. That makes tackling your diabetes-related activities, even those in your calendar, that much harder. Try to leave gaps of time (or padding, as we like to call it) in between items in your calendar. This will serve as a natural pressure relief valve and help you accomplish all of your tasks.

Based on the type of work you do, you might have certain customers or clients who take priority over others, ones who are so important that, when they are scheduled, you make every effort to stick to the schedule and not cancel. Your diabetes-related activities need to be treated the same way. If you do have to make some time adjustments, that’s OK. Just remember that if you build some buffer time into the schedule between your appointments, you and your health will be the priority.

Here’s an example: Let’s say you have an 11 a.m. meeting with a colleague to discuss a presentation. You are aware that you have a repeat appointment reminder in your calendar to check your blood sugar every day at noon. In addition, you have another meeting with a potential client at 12:30 p.m. Set up “padding” before and after each meeting (about 10 minutes) to take care of your diabetes needs, such as checking your blood sugar and treating it if it’s low. Based on the above example, put in appointment reminders at 10:50 a.m. and 12:10 p.m., which will build the padding into your schedule. This gives you the precious time you need take care of yourself before your next appointment.

QUICK TIP

Don’t forget about your virtual team. If you are comfortable, think about letting a co-worker (or your boss) know your parameters for scheduling meetings as well as any essential information necessary when it comes to your diabetes care. Type up a “one sheet” with detailed instructions for what to do if you are feeling unwell while on a group Zoom call or Skype meeting, and share it accordingly. Make sure to include emergency contact numbers, doctors’ information and any other pertinent information.

4. Move around and stay active.

Stay physically active during the day to help improve your blood sugar levels and gain more mental focus. If you have a sedentary job, move your feet up and down while you sit at your desk. Try to walk up and down stairs or around your home (or outside, if possible) a few times a day. Take a walk after you eat lunch or during breaktime. If possible, outfit your workspace with either an adjustable or standing desk.

Do you get 3 p.m. cravings and find yourself drifting to your kitchen? Be aware of what triggers you and prepare for it. Keep light weights or Pilates bands underneath your desk (or work area) and lift them over your head every so often (or every time you feel a craving coming on) for a nice stretch. You’ll keep your arms toned and your

hands out of the pantry closet, and you’ll burn a few calories at the same time. What a great way to stay healthy!

Bestry offers this terrific tip to get her steps in every day (and stay hydrated): “Every time the alarm on my Fitbit goes off, I walk at least 250 steps, and then I drink a glass of water. I used to use a water-tracking app, but I found myself ignoring it, so tying it to the end of the hour, after my mini-walk, works better.”

QUICK TIP

Repurpose the time you previously spent commuting if you had been working outside the home. Plan to go on a walk or bike ride after work hours or during a well-deserved break. Try meditating, meeting a friend for a walk or doing a free online exercise or yoga program. Remember to check your blood glucose more often if you embark on a new exercise program.

5. Keep diabetes supplies organized where you work.

Now that you have your workday schedule in place, it’s time to think about how to organize your diabetes supplies while working at home. If the location of your home office or designated work area is far from where you typically house your diabetes supplies, consider creating a “supply storage station” consisting of all your essential needs. Most people don’t want to have to take time to walk a flight of stairs to check their blood sugar or grab a snack. Have your supplies close at hand to provide you with a much-needed visual cue and reminder that it’s time to tend to your needs around your diabetes care.

QUICK TIP

Take a few minutes on Sunday evening to restock your home office diabetes supply station for the week. If you work on weekends, restock your supply station after a day off. You’ll feel refreshed and able to better assess your inventory for the week ahead. Remember to set a reminder on your smartphone calendar to “restock your diabetes supply station.”

6. Rituals. Routines. Repeat.

Do you miss your morning routine of stopping at your local coffee shop to pick up your brew? Or the daily 9 a.m. in-person team meeting to discuss the pressing work matters at hand? Rituals and routines are important to our daily lives. They allow us to move through our tasks without thinking about what’s next. And, when we give our brains a break from consciously planning and preparing certain todos, it allows fewer things to get in our way of accomplishing the work that requires effort.

Try to replicate those routines and rituals at home. Put much-needed structure in your day by setting up a daily team web call to review priorities and projects, “commute” to work each morning by taking a walk around the block while FaceTiming with a friend, or stop at your local coffee shop to pick up a cup of coffee. Routines can make life easier, save you time and provide a sense of calm.

Bestry builds control into her day by keeping her work environment separate from the kitchen. “The problem with snacking is that once I start, I have trouble stopping, so I don’t start, at least during the workday. I’ve turned my dining room into an office. During the workday, to make it easier to attend webinars and virtual meetings without a distracting background, I have a three-panel

divider behind me, separating my office from the kitchen. It’s not convenient to keep closing the divider to go into the kitchen, so increasing the activation energy just a teeny bit keeps me from going into the kitchen to mindlessly graze.”

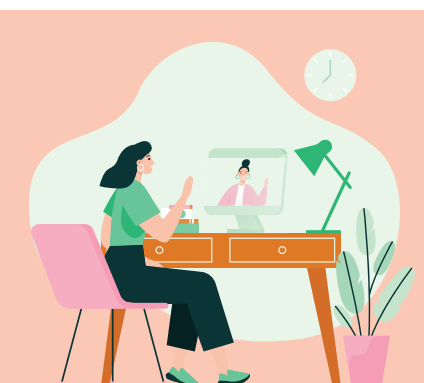
QUICK TIP

Need help building daily habits? Time to head to the Habit Hub. It’s an app that helps you create daily habits by reminding you to perform a task and tracking when you complete it. The app creates a visual “chain” showing each day the task was completed. As the chain gets longer, it serves as an incentive to keep at the task, so you don’t break the chain. You can organize your tasks into categories and then customize each one according to how often you’re supposed to do it. It’s incredibly flexible and makes setting up and staying in a routine a breeze. **DSM**

Leslie Josel is a certified professional organizer, owner of Order Out of Chaos, and creator of the award-winning Academic Planner: A Tool for Time Management. Susan Weiner, MS, RDN, CDCES, FADCES, is the owner of Susan Weiner Nutrition, PLLC, and the 2015 AADE Diabetes Educator of the Year. Together they wrote The Complete Diabetes Organizer: Your Guide to a Less Stressful and More Manageable Diabetes Life.

FOCUSMATE

An accountability buddy is someone who works alongside you to help you get things done. However, that’s not always a reliable option. Enter Focusmate! Using online video calls, the folks at Focusmate automatically pair you with a partner who makes sure you show up, get to work, limit distractions and accomplish your goals. Schedule a work period through the app’s online calendar. Show up at the time you scheduled to meet your “buddy.” Begin working. There’s video (but no



audio), so your buddy can see that you are on track and on task. After the 50-minute session, you share your progress and you’re done. Now, that’s a true partner!

