

## [guest editorial]

One of the toughest things about diabetes is that there is so much to do. You need to follow a healthy meal plan, exercise regularly, check blood glucose levels, take medications on a timely basis, examine your feet, and more. Even worse, these tasks require your attention every day. Like any challenging job, all that effort and worry can wear you down, especially if you never get a break. Wouldn't it be great to take a "diabetes vacation" from time to time?

The truth is that most people *do* take vacations from diabetes. Given the pressures of daily life, almost nobody manages their diabetes perfectly. Many people compromise their diabetes care—at least to some degree. They may stop checking their feet, "forget" to exercise, cut back on blood glucose monitoring, or choose not to follow a diabetes-friendly meal plan from time to time. In almost all cases, this is considered to be bad, "sinful," or "noncompliant." But is that necessarily so?

It's true that diabetes vacations often have negative consequences, especially if they are poorly planned and last a long time.

Consider Reggie, who felt so angry at diabetes that he ignored almost all of his doctor's treatment recommendations *for decades*. The cost of this vacation was considerable: chronically el-

evated blood glucose levels, significant vision loss, and major kidney damage. During these years of vacationing, Reggie tried hard not to think about diabetes, but it still intruded on his thoughts at times, making him feel guilty and frightened about what might happen next. Some vacation!

But some diabetes vacations can be enjoyable and even beneficial to your diabetes management. These types of vacations are typically brief, planned in advance, and involve the support and participation of others. Think of them as "mini-vacations." Like a real vacation, they can be invigorating—giving you the break you need from the "job" of diabetes.

Consider Virginia. After years of struggling with late-night chocolate binges, Virginia found her solution in a weekly diabetes vacation. In place of her nightly binges, Virginia and her husband decided to go out every Saturday night for a chocolate milkshake, her favorite dessert. By vacationing in this manner, Virginia no longer felt so deprived and out of control around sweets each night. As a result, she felt better and her blood glucose levels improved. Virginia's vacation involved careful planning (close attention to her blood glucose levels followed by appropriate insulin adjustments), good use of her husband's support (he also loved milkshakes), and time limits (Saturday nights only).

Here are some tips to remember before you plan a diabetes vacation:

**1. Plan ahead.** Talk first with your health care provider about how a brief diabetes vacation might make sense for you and if so, which kind. Taking a break from your diabetes shouldn't mean that your blood glucose levels have to suffer.

**2. Identify a single change.** Don't take a break from everything! Instead, select a single action and be specific. You might plan to cut back on blood glucose monitoring on Saturdays or skip your usual morning exercise during your brother's visit next weekend.

**3. Be reasonable.** Prepare a diabetes vacation that is of a short enough duration that it won't wreck your diabetes management, but frequent enough to give you something to look forward to.

**4. Don't do it alone.** Diabetes vacations are more likely to be harmful when they don't involve the active support of others. When you involve your loved ones, you are more likely to be successful.

If you already take diabetes vacations, why not make the next one a safe, positive experience, one that can help to restore your energy and improve your overall diabetes care?

## Time For A "Diabetes Vacation?"

*By William H. Polonsky, PhD, CDE*