

Solving Problems and Planning for the Unexpected

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Living with diabetes is easier with a consistent daily routine, but the reality is that life throws us curve balls, and minor problems can have a major impact. It is important for people with diabetes to learn problem solving skills that will help them adapt to unexpected problems, stay resilient in the face of challenges, and plan for the unexpected (including emergencies).

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the four steps to successful problem solving and how to use them to adapt to unexpected situations in their efforts to manage their diabetes.
- Name at least three action steps they plan to take to prepare for emergencies.

MODULE 6

🕒 **DISCUSSION TIME**
45-60 minutes

- 📋 **OUTLINE**
1. Problem solving skills
 2. Common problems while living with diabetes
 3. Planning for the unexpected (including emergencies)

☆ KEY MESSAGES

1. Good problem-solving skills can help a person with diabetes be more prepared and more resilient (recover more quickly) when unexpected situations or problems occur.

2. Having good problem-solving skills means being able to recognize a problem, develop a plan to solve the problem, prepare for and use the plan, and evaluate how well the plan worked.

3. It is important for people with diabetes and their families to be prepared for emergencies and natural disasters like hurricanes, snowstorms, and earthquakes.

🔗 CONNECTING THREADS

Connecting Threads are topics that can be incorporated into *New Beginnings* sessions depending on the goals and needs of your participants.

Recommended Connecting Threads:

- [Facilitating *New Beginnings* Online](#)
- [Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support Services](#)
- [Building Social Connections in Family and Community Circles](#)
- [Understanding Health Information](#)

🖱️ GOING VIRTUAL TIPS

- Use the virtual whiteboard to brainstorm ways to be prepared for emergencies. See the [Connecting Thread: Facilitating *New Beginnings* Online](#) for ideas on how to adapt activities.
- The content on the [Problem-Solving Plan Worksheet](#) can be shared as a Microsoft Word document or Google Doc before the session or as an at-home activity. Group members can then fill it in online without having to print it.
- The video stories for this module can be played by sharing your screen (and computer audio) through your video teleconferencing platform. Another option is to share the links to the videos with your group members by email before the session starts.

MATERIALS

Suggested stories for this module:

- [Healthy Eating at Family Gatherings and Special Events](#): Family gatherings and special events can be hard for people working to manage or prevent diabetes. Learn about ways to stay on track when it comes to healthy eating at special events. (Video: about 3 minutes)
- [Diabetes Travel Tips](#): Diabetes doesn't keep David from traveling. But he makes sure he plans ahead when he takes a trip. Learn about some of David's tips for traveling with diabetes. (Video: about 4 minutes)

Handout:

- [Problem Solving Plan Worksheet](#)

Group Discussion

This discussion focuses on problem solving and disaster preparedness for people living with diabetes.

Problem-Solving Skills

GROUP LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

TALKING POINTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



SAY:

Problems are a part of life. People oversleep and run late, flights are delayed, and people get sick.

Everyday problems that seem small can be more serious and stressful for a person with diabetes. Unexpected problems and changes in daily plans can make it harder to stay on track and meet health goals.

People who develop good problem-solving skills are better able to address problems and stay on track.

Let's take a closer look at some skills that will help you be better prepared when you encounter unexpected problems in your daily life.

There are four steps to successful problem solving you can use when you find yourself facing an unexpected issue: **Identify**, **Plan**, **Solve**, and **Check**.



**STEP 1:
IDENTIFY**



Recognize when there is a problem and understand what is causing it.

Try to recognize what the real source of the problem is and what could be causing it. It sounds simple, but you may need to think about your situation from all sides to really understand the main cause (or causes) of the problem you are facing.

For example, imagine that John skips breakfast because he is running late in the morning.



ASK:

What might be causing this problem?

Examples: John is not sleeping well, John is going to bed late, John is depressed and has trouble getting out of bed, John might have really low blood sugar in the morning.



SAY:

Having trouble waking up in the morning can disrupt your regular schedule and make you run late and skip breakfast. Oversleeping because you were up late the night before watching a movie with friends is different than not being able to sleep or not wanting to get out of bed because you feel sad, anxious, or depressed.

When you understand what is causing the problem, you can start to come up with solutions that will work.

**STEP 2:
PLAN**



Come up with a strategy to solve the problem.

Create your plan to solve the problem. You may need to learn more about the problem and reach out to others for resources.



ASK:

For example, John had the flu last week and he had trouble keeping food down. He didn't have much of an appetite.

- What can John do to create a plan for the next time he is sick? How should he prepare and what resources should he look for?
- Do you know what to do if you get sick and cannot eat your regular diet?
- How do you make sure your blood sugar stays at a healthy level, and how might you need to adjust your medicine when you're sick?
- What plan could you develop for when you are sick? Where could you go or who could you ask for more information?

Examples: John could learn more about how he might need to adjust his medicine when he's sick. He may need reminders to continue taking his insulin, even if he can't eat. He could try to drink liquids to take the place of the fruits and breads he usually eats. He could talk to his health care team and be aware of when to go to the emergency room.



SAY:

You can make a sick day plan so you can continue to manage your diabetes on sick days. Talk to your health care team and use online resources and tip sheets to develop your plan.

Think about what might get in the way of your plan and how you can overcome possible barriers.

This kind of research is important for the planning stage of problem solving.

STEP 3:
SOLVE



Apply your plan to solve your problem.

Apply your plan to solve your problem. You have gathered resources and come up with a plan. Having what you need in place will make you more likely to use your plan when the problem happens.

For example, John wants to solve the problem of running late in the morning and skipping breakfast. He has identified that the main problem is that he stays up too late watching television. He then planned to go to sleep earlier to help him wake up on time.



ASK:

What can John put in place to help him follow through with his plan and solve his problem?

Examples: John can set a reminder on his phone that alerts him when it is bedtime; Instead of watching television in the evening, John can read a book in bed to relax and get ready to go to sleep.



SAY:

The “Solve” step is more than simply solving the problem. It is testing out the plan you have developed and using tools to prompt yourself to carry through with it. It might mean changing something in your behavior now to help you more easily adjust later.

**STEP 4:
CHECK**



Ask yourself what parts of your plan worked and what parts did not work in order to improve it.

Check or evaluate the solution and adjust as needed. When you have tried your plan, determine what worked and what did not work so you can improve your plan. Decide what you will do differently next time. Learn from what works and apply it to other problems.

Don't give up. Keep an overall positive attitude when you encounter problems. Stay calm and remind yourself that you can solve them.



ACTIVITY:

Think-Pair-Share: Problem Solving

The goal of this activity is to have participants develop a plan for common problems that affect their ability to manage their diabetes.

- Give each participant the [Problem Solving Plan Worksheet](#). Ask them to think about a problem they have related to managing their diabetes.
- Ask participants to pair up with another group member and discuss their plan.
- Ask participants to share their plans.

Be careful about allowing participants to comment on the plans of others unless the person sharing specifically asks for advice from the group. The goal is to encourage people to identify ways to solve their own problems. Unsolicited advice can make people feel less empowered.

Common Problems When Living With Diabetes

GROUP LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

TALKING POINTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



SAY:

Most problems can be solved and most challenges overcome with planning. We can think ahead about what might happen and have ideas in mind for how to handle it. Being prepared can help you successfully take care of problems when they happen.

Let's look at some examples of common problems that people with diabetes might encounter.



WATCH:

Healthy Eating at Family Gatherings and Special Events

(Video: about 3 minutes)



ASK:

- What problems did Robin, the diabetes care and education specialist, and dietitian, discuss in the video?
- What solutions did she suggest for these problems?
- Do you think this strategy would work for you if you were in this situation? Why or why not?
- What useful tips did you learn from this video?
- What other strategies can you think of for sticking to your plans during family events?

Examples of problems: Struggling to resist tempting food at family gatherings, overeating.

Examples of solutions: Look at the menu ahead of time to plan what fits in your meal plan. Eat slowly and savor. Eat a healthy snack before you arrive. Fix only one plate to enjoy. Drink water. Enjoy a sliver of dessert with a plate of fruit.



WATCH:

Diabetes Travel Tips (Video: about 4 minutes)

GROUP LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

TALKING POINTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



ASK:

- What problems did David say he or others with diabetes sometimes experience when traveling?
- How does David prepare for unexpected problems he might experience while traveling?
- Can you relate to any of the problems that David mentioned?
- What tips did David mention that could help you in your travel plans? What tips can you use even when you are not taking a trip?
- What other strategies can you use to be prepared when you are away from home?

Examples of problems: Flight delays, not having access to insulin or food when you need it, difficulty accounting for time zone changes and medicine timing.

Examples of solutions: Bring extra insulin and medicines. Carry a meter and strips. Bring glucose tabs or snacks in case of low blood sugar. Wear a medical ID. Talk to your doctor or health care team before you travel to help you prepare.



SAY:

It is very important for people with diabetes to be able to resolve the problems that might affect their ability to manage their diabetes. Good problem-solving skills can help you deal with unexpected situations that throw off your routine or progress, so that you can continue to take care of your health.

Disaster Preparedness

GROUP LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

TALKING POINTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



SAY:

It is important for people with diabetes and their families to be ready for an emergency or natural disaster.



ASK:

What are some things you can do to prepare for an emergency?



SAY:

Here are things you and your family can do to prepare for emergencies and natural disasters.

- Make an emergency supply kit.
- Let people know you have diabetes. Wear an ID bracelet or something that will identify you as a person with diabetes.
- Keep emergency supplies of water so you have enough to drink. Stay hydrated.
- Keep emergency supplies of food.
- Keep something like glucose tablets or juice that has sugar in it with you at all times to treat low blood sugar.
- Check your feet every day and get help for any cuts or sores.
- Keep a list of all of your medicines, drugstores, doctors, and medical conditions in a resealable plastic bag.
- Take your medicines and check your blood sugar regularly.
- Make a plan for how you will keep in touch with family members. Keep the phone numbers of out-of-town family or friends you can call in case you have trouble reaching people who live near you.
- Discuss your emergency planning strategies with your family members or friends so they are aware and can better help you in an emergency.



CLOSE THE SESSION

- Take final questions.
- Thank the group for their participation.
- Explain the at-home activity, if applicable.
- Remind participants about the next session. Ask if they have specific questions or issues they would like addressed.
- Ask participants to do the session evaluation.



AT-HOME ACTIVITY

- Ask participants to do one item from their [Problem-Solving Plan Worksheet](#).
 - If participants did not do the worksheet during the session, give them a copy to do at home.

RESOURCES

Use these resources to learn more about the topics in this module, expand the discussion, or as resources for participants.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- [Diabetes Care During Emergencies](#)
- [Diabetes Kickstart](#)
- [Managing Insulin in an Emergency](#)
- [Your Diabetes Compass](#)

[Ready.Gov](#)

REFERENCES

- Fitzpatrick, S. L., Schumann, K. P., & Hill-Briggs, F. (2013). Problem solving interventions for diabetes self-management and control: a systematic review of the literature. *Diabetes research and clinical practice*, 100(2), 145-161.
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