



Porcupine Clinic's Diabetic Guides to Native American Ceremonies

This series of Guides for people with diabetes who want to take part in Native American Ceremonies cover:

- ✦ Dancing and Diabetes
- ✦ Powwows, Potlucks and Diabetes
- ✦ Sun Dance and Diabetes
- ✦ Sweat Lodge and Diabetes
- ✦ Vision Quest and Diabetes

The Guides were written by Richard Iron Cloud and Robert Kirk with the support of the Porcupine Clinic.

Over 30 Lakota, Dakota and Ojibwa Ceremonial Leaders have reviewed and are distributing the Porcupine Clinic's Diabetic Guides to Native American Ceremonies.

Clinics that have reviewed the Guides and are distributing them are:

- Native American Community Clinic
Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Indian Health Board of Minneapolis
Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Min No Aya Win Clinic
Cloquet, Minnesota

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Guides will be supplied at no cost to:

- Porcupine Clinic
- People who come in person to the Clinic
- Clinics and Ceremonial Leaders that people from Porcupine Clinic can contact in person
- Clinics and Ceremonial Leaders in Minneapolis and Saint Paul
- Clinics and Ceremonial Leaders that Robert Kirk can contact in person

For all others, the Porcupine Clinic will supply:

Sample set of Guides – Free with self-addressed, stamped business-sized envelope

10 sets of Guides – Cost: \$5.00

50 sets of Guides – Cost: \$10.00

If your clinic/organization is not tax exempt, include 4% South Dakota Sales Tax for the postage and handling.

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Powwows, Potlucks, and Diabetes

Nothing beats getting together, having fun and eating with friends; that is what powwows and potlucks are all about. The happiness and laughter are good medicine for you. They lower your stress and lift your spirits. But all that food and all that great tasting fat can pose a challenge to someone with diabetes. Here are some suggestions on how to eat right at powwows and potlucks.

Have a snack before going to take the edge off your appetite, spread out the food and decrease the resistance to sugar uptake.

Bring your own water or diet pop. Drinking them will help reduce your appetite.

Take the opportunity to try low fat foods prepared in new ways. Take small servings and try more dishes. You can get chips and dip anytime.

Use smaller plates that hold less food. Pace yourself between trips. It takes the stomach 15 to 20 minutes to know it's full.



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Bring a dish to the potluck that shows how great a low fat dish can taste.

Look for interesting salads, fresh fruits and vegetables.

For the dishes you like, go back for the recipe not seconds.

If you take something that isn't worth the calories, don't finish it. If your auntie made it, eat a polite amount and compliment her.

Plan to walk or dance off some of the extra calories.

If you plan to deal with overeating by skimping during the days before and after, make sure to adjust your medications, and check your blood sugars.

Remember to have fun and enjoy the company.

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Vision Quests and Diabetes

The vision comes during isolation, but the understanding comes by going back to the community. It is this dual nature of the Vision Quest that has made it such a powerful ritual with Native Americans. A Vision Quest is where a person withdraws to an isolated area (often a hill) and fasts and prays for the spirits to give a dream or vision through which he or she can achieve a better life or a better life for his or her family and community. As a result, a Vision Quest can be a critical element in a person's ability to manage their diabetes. However a Vision Quest for a person with diabetes poses some medical challenges but with proper preparation they can participate. Most diabetic treatment plans are focused on utilizing food properly; it may take some effort to develop a plan for fasting.

It is important to control your blood sugar while fasting. Out of control blood sugar can affect your senses and hide any visions from the spirits.

These are some suggestions:

With your health care provider develop a treatment plan that can be used with fasting. Be patient, it may take several weeks before you will know how your body responds to fasting.

Drink plenty of water before starting the Quest. If you are going to do a sweat before or after a Quest, drink extra water to avoid dehydration.



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These are some suggestions:

With your health care provider develop a treatment plan that can be used with fasting. Be patient, it may take several weeks before you will know how your body responds to fasting.

Drink plenty of water before starting the Quest. If you are going to do a sweat before or after a Quest, drink extra water to avoid dehydration.

Start by fasting for only one day and test your blood sugar several times. It is important to have experience with fasting before undertaking even a one-day Vision Quest.

Arrange to have one or two friends observe you unseen during your Quest. Arrange to go through a routine that will allow the observers to judge how you are feeling.

Longer fasts require more elaborate preparations and treatment plans. Remember to check your blood sugar often.

Finally, since diabetes dramatically increases the chances of you having a heart attack or stroke, make sure you know their warning signs and symptoms.

Talk with other people who have diabetes and have undertaken Vision Quests. Talk with the spiritual leaders. Your health care provider can help you contact leaders who have experience accommodating people with diabetes. They can help you avoid the potential problems and gain the benefits of one of the most profound experiences in Native American life.

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Dancing and Diabetes

The drum has been called the heartbeat of mother earth and dancing is a way of experiencing that heartbeat. Dancing can help you feel the connections with your ancestors and their strength and courage. It also helps you feel connected with your children, and grandchildren and the others at the powwow. It is for them you are managing your diabetes. Some have found dancing lowers their stress and helps control their blood sugar long after the dance. To get the most from your dancing, consider the following:

If your dancing is quite strenuous, and you are taking diabetic medications such as insulin or oral drugs that stimulate insulin production you may need to add some carbohydrates to avoid low blood sugars.

The low blood sugar effect may be delayed several hours; test and eat after dancing.

Very strenuous exercise can dehydrate you, resulting in elevated blood sugar. If your blood sugar is already above 300 (250 if ketones are present), you should get your blood sugar under better control before dancing.

If your blood sugar is below 100 take a snack to get it up before dancing.



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If your blood sugar is below 100 take a snack to get it up before dancing.

Regardless of your blood sugar drink plenty of water; regalia can get very hot. If you are going to do a sweat before or after dancing, drink extra water to avoid dehydration and high blood sugars.

Have someone at the dance be aware of your diabetes; someone you would be comfortable asking to help if you have symptoms of high or low blood sugar. Wear a medical alert ID and carry a fast acting source of sugar.

Make sure your shoes are comfortable. Wear moccasins with hard soles or insoles or padding along with thick socks. Check your feet after dancing.

If you have retinopathy check with your ophthalmologist before starting strenuous dancing.

Finally, check your cardiovascular health with your health provider especially if you are new to dancing. Diabetes dramatically increases the chances of you having a heart attack or stroke so make sure you know their warning signs and symptoms.

Talk with others who have diabetes and dance. Don't stop dancing just because you have diabetes; it may be just the medicine you need.

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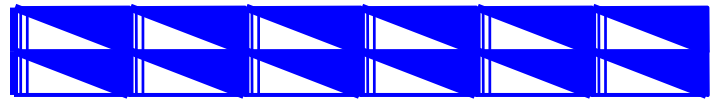
Sweat Lodge and Diabetes

You sweat a lot in a sweat lodge, and the sweat gives you a sense of special cleaning and renewal, from the inside out. The sweat lodge is used for purification by itself or as preparation for other ceremonies, for example the Sun Dance, and the Vision Quest. The sweat lodge can strengthen your spirituality. For a person with diabetes, a sweat lodge can reduce the stress in their lives and renew their determination to manage their disease. Some have found that sweats bring their blood sugars back to normal. Here are some suggestions that will help make a successful Sweat Lodge experience.

Drink enough water before a sweat; the excess sweating can dehydrate you and increase your blood sugar. If your blood sugar is above 300 (250 if ketones are present) you should get your blood sugar under better control before doing a sweat.

Sweating in sweat lodge is not the same as sweating from exercise but it can still drop your blood sugars. Check your blood sugar after a sweat if it is your first time or if you are medicating your diabetes with insulin or oral drugs that stimulate insulin production.

If you are going to a sweat before or after a Vision Quest or during a Sun Dance, drink extra liquids to avoid dehydration. Take liquids if they are offered between doors.



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If you are going to a sweat before or after a Vision Quest or during a Sun Dance, drink extra liquids to avoid dehydration. Take liquids if they are offered between doors.

Do not go into a sweat lodge alone; have someone in the sweat be aware of your diabetes. The Sweat Lodge is such an intense experience that you cannot rely on your feelings that normally indicate high or low blood sugar.

Make sure you don't burn your feet on the rocks, the hot coals or the hot spray. Sit as far away from the rocks as practical. Check the position of your legs before the door is closed and between doors. Protect your feet with a towel.

Finally, since diabetes dramatically increases the chances of you having a heart attack or stroke, make sure you know their warning signs and symptoms.

Sweat Lodges are an important way to connect with yourself, your spirituality and your tribe and heritage. Talk with others who have diabetes and have done sweats. Your health care provider can help you contact leaders who have experience accommodating people with diabetes. Do not stop going to sweat lodges just because you have diabetes; they may be just the medicine you need.

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Sun Dance and Diabetes

The Sundance Ceremony is one of the most dramatic of Native American ceremonies but it is still fundamentally spiritual to the people who take part. Four days of outdoor dancing and visiting with friends and relatives from across the country is very spiritual. For those who choose to undergo the piercing and tearing of their flesh, the pain and its release can put the everyday challenges of managing diabetes in a new perspective. A number of Native Americans with diabetes have used the Sundance to develop the deep spirituality needed for managing their diabetes. The Sundance can make living with diabetes seem easy.

Use the pledge year before the Sundance to minimize your medications through diet and exercise while maintaining good sugar control. Both traditional and western medicines can help you do this.

Test your blood sugar regularly throughout the Sundance. If you are going to fast during the Sundance, develop a treatment plan with your health care provider that can be used with fasting.



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If you are going to do a sweat during the Sundance, drink plenty of liquids to avoid dehydration and high blood sugars.

New wounds should be treated as soon as practical to speed the healing.

Finally, since diabetes dramatically increases the chances of you having a heart attack or stroke, it is important that you know their warning signs and symptoms.

Talk with other diabetics who have gone through a Sundance. Talk with the leaders. Your health care provider can help you contact leaders who have offered to guide those who truly want to undertake a Sundance but are concerned about their diabetes. They can help you avoid the potential problems and gain the benefits of one of the most profound spiritual experiences in Native American religion.

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