

Chapter 19

Special Challenges of the Teen Years



The teen years are a time when young people go between wanting to be an independent adult and wanting to stay a dependent child. It is not surprising that they go back and forth when it comes to taking over the diabetes responsibilities. Many research studies now show that when parents stay involved in diabetes management, the diabetes will be in better control.

THE CHALLENGES

- The teen-aged years are often the most difficult for having good sugar control (a good HbA_{1c} level). And yet, they are important years in relation to diabetes complications.
- The teens in the intensive-treatment arm of the DCCT (Chapter 14) often had weekly clinic visits, but still had a mean HbA_{1c} of 8.1% (compared with 7.1% for the adults).
- Growth and sexual hormones are at high levels and interfere with insulin activity.

- Insulin pumps, more frequent insulin shots, and the new basal insulins, insulin glargine (Lantus) or insulin detemir (Levemir) can help some teens. However, if meal shots (or boluses for pumpers) are missed, the HbA_{1c} will be high.
- Driving a car safely is very important beginning in the teen years. It is important to check a blood sugar before driving. Driving with a low blood sugar can result in problems that can be just as severe as if driving while drunk.
- Diabetes is often not a priority to the teenager. Teenagers have special issues including:
 - **struggle for independence**
 - **growth and body changes**
 - **self-identity**
 - **peer relationships**
 - **sexuality**

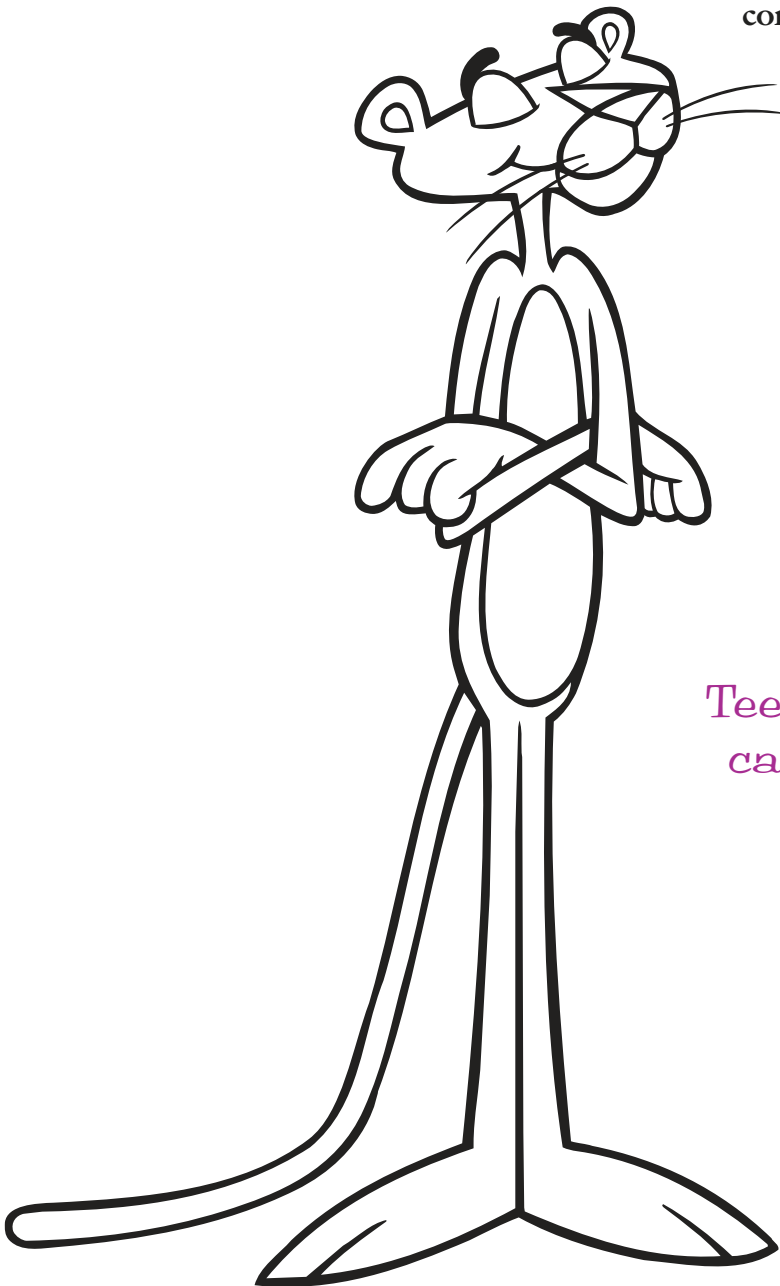
- **consistency:** is considered a key word in diabetes management. This refers to eating, exercise, stress, or times of insulin shots. It is often hard for teens to be consistent.
- driving a car
- college
- emotional changes

These are all discussed in detail in the 11th edition of *“Understanding Diabetes.”*

🐾 **Parents must:**

- **find ways to stay involved in diabetes management.** They can be helpful in keeping the log book and in talking about insulin dosage.
- **be available to help, but should try not to be overbearing or constantly nagging.** A supportive adult can be helpful for a person with diabetes no matter their age.

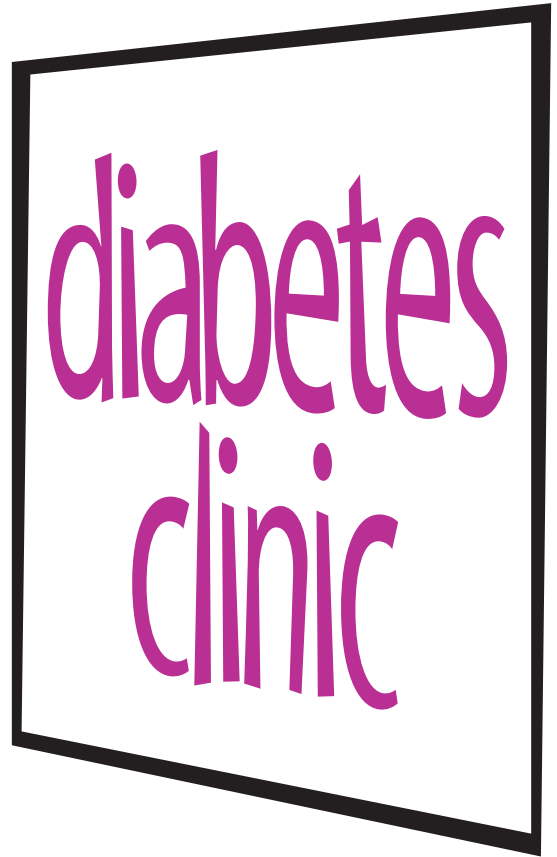
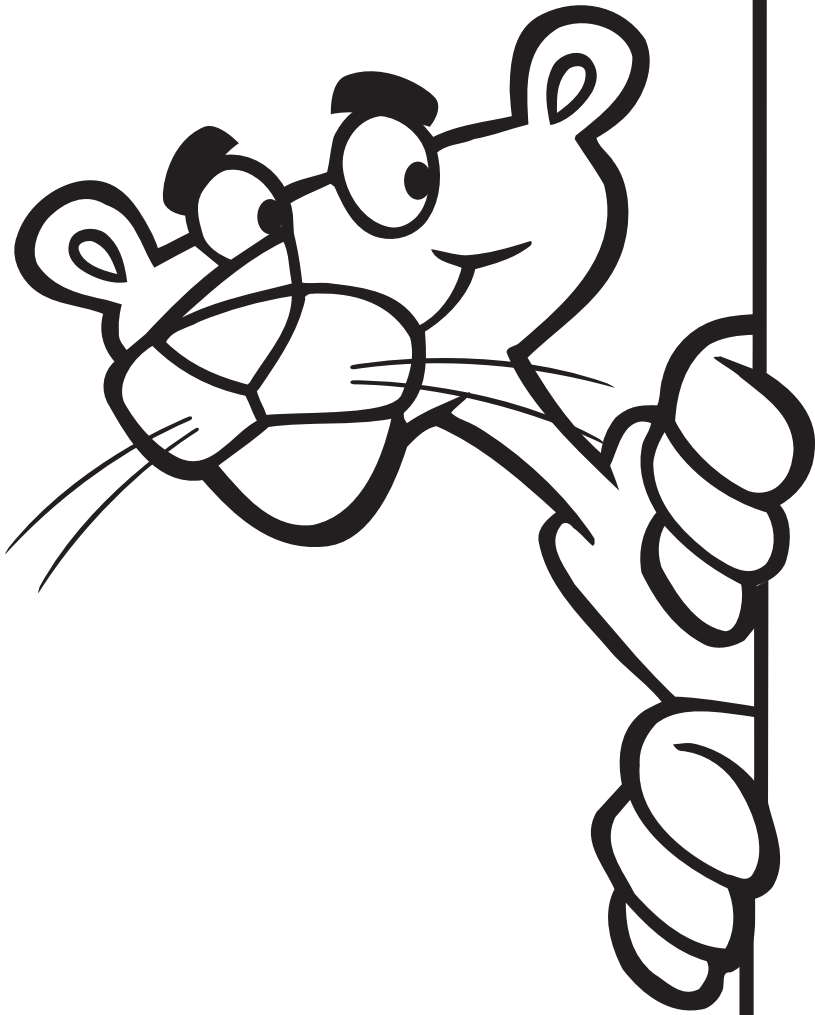
🐾 It is not surprising that diabetes is often referred to as a “disease of compromise.”



Teenagers with diabetes can lead normal lives.



Normal teen
activities can provide
much-needed exercise.



Clinic visits
should be
every three months
for people with
diabetes.