

## Put the Brakes on Diabetes

By: Kay Pfeiffer, ([kay.pfeiffer@truelifecare.com](mailto:kay.pfeiffer@truelifecare.com))  
[TrueLifeCare, LLC](#)

Failure to take the personal actions required to manage diabetes is like failing to service a rig's brakes or other key systems. This will lead to shorter life and predictable early failure. Diabetes is no different in the human body.

Diabetes is not curable, but it can be managed. There are two basic types:

**Type 1:** About 5% of everyone with diabetes, this most often occurs during childhood but can develop later in life. The immune system inexplicably attacks the cells of the pancreas, which means a person with Type 1 makes zero insulin. Every day of their life thereafter they must check glucose and inject insulin. Failure to do this can lead to death in just one to two weeks.

**Type 2:** This is what 95% of people with diabetes have developed. It is considered a lifestyle disease. Almost one in every five drivers has diabetes. Managing it requires lifestyle changes. There are medications that help a person get lower glucose levels, but without lifestyle changes the disease will still progressively worsen and damage the body's organs.

How does this play out for the driver? It can be blurred eye-sight or even black "blind" spots in their field of vision. Neuropathy leads to numbness and loss of feeling in the feet and sometimes the hands. Kidney disease causes strong physical feelings of being "unwell" resulting in absenteeism and loss of productivity. A heart problem can put the driver out of commis-

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sion for an extended period. Careers will prematurely end.

These developments have a negative impact in several ways. There is increased [risk for accidents](#) among workers with diabetes. The damage from diabetes is why healthcare costs for those with it are [two to three times the costs](#) for those with no diabetes. Drivers with diabetes will miss [more days of work](#) and that reduces revenues and their earnings. But it does not have to be this way!

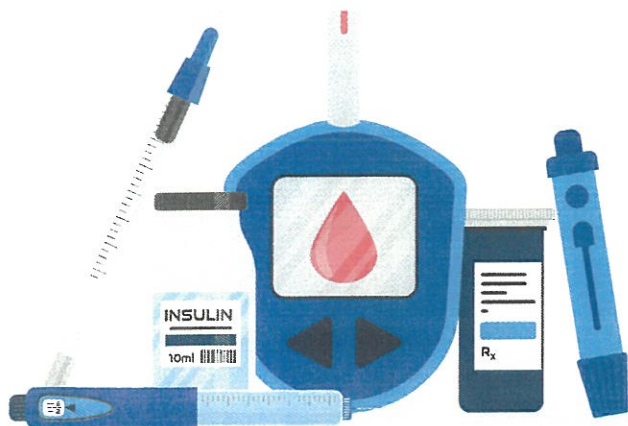
## A Playbook for the Silver Lining

In the June 2022 issue of Health Affairs, Dr. Thomas S. Bodenheimer [published his review and study](#) of 278 diabetes improvement trials. To paraphrase his conclusions:

Patients are the main decision makers. Self-management support is essential to assist these patients in managing their diabetes and related social problems. Primary care clinicians do not have that time.

Employers have a vested interest in health, safety and costs. Providing this support can be well worth it. It has been done at one national firm, the below chart tracks the relative change in health plan costs for employees with diabetes (mostly drivers) across three full years of health plan eligibility:

Across the two years those electing to receive the benefit of



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proactive engagement with a nurse certified for health coaching and support incurred almost \$8,000 lower healthcare costs person. That also translates to more time on the road.

Employee Retention was better: At the beginning, 30+% of the employees with diabetes joined and participated. At the end of the two years, 68% were still employed and working. That compares to just 59% of the employees with diabetes who did not join the support program. Was it the program? While we cannot be certain, it is a positive correlation.

Yes, many of the complications caused by diabetes can be prevented. But not from medications alone. It takes dietary and physical activity tweaks along with periodic monitoring of blood sugar levels, maintaining normal blood pressure and cholesterol levels, getting treatment for any early kidney disease, having annual eye exams, and proper diabetes education.

Dr. Bodenheimer's review of the 278 trials documents the difficulty a person with diabetes has doing what is "right" to manage their diabetes. His review also points to the benefits and success of those same people when they have qualified, ongoing support to help them in their life with diabetes.

People can and do manage diabetes. Why let your team members be restricted to the usual care "default option"? There are programs available to help drivers with diabetes in turn better help themselves. Look at it the way equipment is serviced for a longer and higher quality life. You can have appreciative employees coupled with better risk management and lower costs and absenteeism, a winning combination.

**Relative Change in Per Person Costs**

