

Coping with Diabetes

How you feel about yourself can affect how you take care of your diabetes, and how you feel about your diabetes can affect how you take care of yourself.

It may be hard to talk about your diabetes at first. You may feel alone or angry. These feelings are normal at first. You need to allow yourself to have these feelings to adjust to the fact that you have diabetes. If you don't talk about your feelings, it can be difficult to follow your diabetes care plan.

Stages of Adjustment

Diabetes is a chronic disease that will not go away. People with chronic diseases go through stages of adjustment. You may go back and forth between stages as things happen in your life. The goal is to get through these stages until you can accept diabetes. If you get stuck in a stage, it can affect how you handle your diabetes. Your family or friends may be going through these stages too.

What stage are you in?

Shock/denial stage

- When you were first told you had diabetes, you may have thought: "This cannot be happening to me; the doctor must have made a mistake."
- These feelings can buy you time so you can adjust to having diabetes.
- You may not take good care of yourself when you are in this stage.

Anger/fear stage

- Diabetes puts demands on your life.
- It is natural to feel angry because of changes you may need to make.
- Not knowing what to expect can cause fear and anger.
- You may say things like, "I hate it; I'm so afraid; it's not fair."

Bargaining stage

- You may make deals with yourself or your Higher Being.
- Statements may include: "If I start eating healthy, I won't have diabetes."

Depression/sadness stage

- As you make healthy changes, you grieve the loss of your old habits.
- You may become sad and “blue.”
- A diabetes support group may be the place to work through these feelings.
- You may say: “Diabetes is forever; I can’t take a break from it.”

You should talk with your doctor or other health care team member if you are unable to care for yourself, if you lose or gain weight without trying, if you are unable to sleep or sleep too much or if you have feelings of worthlessness.

Adjustment/coping stage

- You feel hopeful.
- You are feeling well.
- You are in charge of your diabetes.
- Statements include: “I have diabetes, so I am going to learn to live well with it.”

Remember: Keep in touch with your feelings and talk about them with your family, friends or a health care team member.

Stress and Diabetes

What is stress?

- Stress is a daily part of life.
- Stress is the way your body responds to any demand put on it.
- A certain amount of stress can be good; it can get you to want to do things or change behavior to help control your blood glucose levels.
- Too much good or bad stress for a long time can impact your physical and mental health.
- What is stressful to one person may not be to another.
- Everyone handles stress differently.
- It helps to know what is stressful to you and how stress affects you.
- If you don’t cope well with stress, it will be helpful to learn new ways to deal with stress.

Stress can impact diabetes by:

- Causing blood glucose levels to go up.
- Making diabetes care more difficult.
- Making you forget what you need to do to take care of yourself.
- Making you feel you don’t care if you take care of yourself or not.

Where does stress come from?

- Thoughts - what we think about something.
- Feelings - how we feel and our attitudes.
- Environment - weather, noise, crowds and time deadlines.
- Our body - growing and aging, effects of high or low blood glucose levels, lack of sleep and unhealthy eating.

Stress symptoms checklist

Listed below are warning signs that can help you see when the stress in your life is starting to get out of hand. Circle the symptoms you have had. Stay alert to them and practice healthy coping skills when you start feeling any of them.

Physical:	Psychological:	Behavioral:
Headaches	Irritability	Forgetfulness
Rise in blood pressure	Becoming easily annoyed	Preoccupation
Rise in blood glucose	Restlessness	Becoming accident prone
Sweating	Lack of motivation	Lack of concentration
Chest pain/tightness	Becoming withdrawn	Inability to get things done
Heart palpitations	Isolation	Loss of creativity
Fatigue	Anxiety	Increased smoking
Digestive problems	Boredom	Increased alcohol consumption
Dizziness	Crying a lot	Missed work days
Increase in weight	Depression	Worrying
Decrease in weight	Hopeless feeling	Drug use
Difficulty sleeping	Sexual decline	
Jaw pain		
Muscle tension		
Cold, clammy hands		
Cold sores		
Canker sores		
Tics, twitching		

Ways to deal with stress

The following are ways you can help yourself deal with stress:

- Solve problems; think in new ways.
- Manage time. Let go of some activities. Know your limits.
- Relax. Balance work with play time.
- Laugh. Use humor.
- Exercise. Activity helps to decrease stress.
- Eat healthy. Remember, unhealthy eating adds stress.
- Take charge. Realize you have the power to change.
- Identify your support systems: Family, friends, health care team, support groups, a Higher Power.
- Use your support system. Family, friends and others can help by:
 - Exercising with you.
 - Cooking healthy meals.
 - Leading the same healthy lifestyle you do.
 - Reminding you to test your blood glucose and take your medication.
 - Taking an interest in your diabetes classes and doctor visits.
 - Listening and talking to you about your thoughts and feelings.
 - Telling you what a great job you are doing.