

# DIABETES AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

## ➤ WHY IS THIS LEAFLET FOR YOU?

Diabetes management is not just about chasing targets and taking treatments. Your diabetes doctor or nurse will want to know how you feel about having diabetes, how you feel you are coping, and if you have any concerns. Getting fed-up with your diabetes is common, and sometimes can lead to depression. Depression is twice as common in people with diabetes compared to people without diabetes.

This leaflet will help you to:

- Understand the close relationship between having diabetes and feeling down or depressed.
- Recognise the signs and symptoms when struggling with your diabetes self-care
- Understand the effect of low mood on diabetes self-care
- Find more help and support

## > BACKGROUND

When you first find out that you have diabetes, it is perfectly normal to feel a range of emotions including shock, anger and denial. As you find out more about the condition and what you need to do to keep healthy, then these negative feelings can subside.

However, about four in ten people with diabetes experience diabetes-specific emotional distress. This affects the ability to manage their diabetes and has important implications for long-term health. The success of your diabetes management depends very much on how well you are able to care for yourself<sup>1</sup>.

Diabetes distress is not classified as a mental health condition. Rather, it is a response to the pressures of living with a demanding long-term condition. It is important to know the difference between depression and diabetes distress because they are not the same and require different treatments.

## > HOW TO RECOGNISE IF YOU HAVE DIABETES DISTRESS OR DEPRESSION

You may have some or all of the following:



## > HOW DOES DIABETES DISTRESS OR DEPRESSION AFFECT YOUR DIABETES?

Feeling down or depressed makes it more difficult to manage your diabetes:

- Apathy or anxiety makes it difficult to look after yourself, such as testing your glucose, being more active, or sticking to a healthy eating plan.
- Feeling depressed can have a direct impact on weight gain, but also being overweight and having a poor body image can cause low mood. Eating can be triggered by emotions rather than hunger: Anxiety, frustration, loneliness, stress, anger and low mood. Food can act as a coping strategy which often began in childhood.
- Hyperglycaemia (high glucose levels) can be caused by
  - Missing medication
  - Not sticking to your healthy eating plan
  - Not wanting to be physically active

The relationship between the person with low mood and diabetes, and their doctor or nurse is crucial for support and guidance during these times.

## > TREATMENT:

You should see your doctor or nurse regularly to discuss how well you are coping with your diabetes self-care. Use this opportunity to discuss your feelings and fears.

- ❓ Are you feeling overwhelmed by all the things you need to do to manage your diabetes?
- ❓ Do you find it difficult to remember your tablets later in the day?
- ❓ Do you worry about having low glucose levels?
- ❓ Do you struggle with trying to lose weight?
- ❓ Are you worried about developing long-term diabetes damage?

If you are struggling with your weight, try keeping a record of what, when and why you are eating to see if there is a link between over-eating and emotions. Cutting down on portion size, without changing the content of your diet, will help you to lose weight. Don't beat yourself up if you have a day when it is hard to keep to your healthier eating plan. See your doctor for support if you need help with managing emotional eating.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about the best diabetes treatment for you. There are now medications for controlling glucose which do not cause low blood glucose levels, are taken just once a day, can help you to lose weight, do not require finger-prick blood testing, and can help to protect you from heart attacks and strokes.

Your doctor or nurse can also signpost you to various organisations that can help and support you to better understand the stress of living with diabetes and how to cope.

## > SUMMARY:

It is not uncommon for people with diabetes to feel overwhelmed by the physical and emotional impact of being diagnosed and living with the condition.

Your healthcare team are here to help you through this. It may help to talk to other people with diabetes via your local diabetes support groups or via an online diabetes forum – see the website below\*.



## > USEFUL RESOURCES:

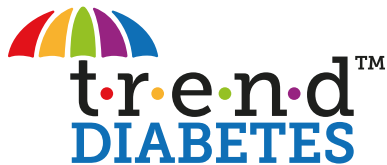
Diabetes UK: [www.forum.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.forum.diabetes.org.uk)\*

[www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/life-with-diabetes/emotional-issues](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/life-with-diabetes/emotional-issues)

Trend Diabetes: [www.trenddiabetes.online](http://www.trenddiabetes.online)

NHS: [www.nhs.uk-depression](http://www.nhs.uk-depression)

**Reference:** 1.Nicolucci A, Kovacs Burns K, Holt RI et al (2013) Diabetes Attitudes, Wishes and Needs second study (DAWN2): cross- national benchmarking of diabetes related psychosocial outcomes for people with diabetes. Diabetic Medicine 30(7): 767-777.



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