

# Coping and Learning to Live With Diabetes

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## Purpose

This section is intended to provide information on the emotional aspects of living and coping with a chronic disease.


## Objectives

At the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the effects diabetes has on your life.
- List stressors in your life.
- Discuss how stress may affect blood glucose levels.
- Identify two methods to cope with stress.
- Identify sources of support for people with diabetes.
- Identify how depression can affect individuals with diabetes.

## Outline

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	*The American Diabetes Association Recognizes this education service as meeting the National Standards for Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support.
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These materials were adapted from Life with Diabetes: A Series of Teaching Outlines by the Michigan Diabetes Research and Training Center, 5th Edition. American Diabetes Association, 2014.

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# Challenges of diabetes

## Major life stressor

Being diagnosed with diabetes is a major life stressor; it requires some changes in your lifestyle.

- You will need to try new behaviors.
- You will need to learn how your body works.
- You will need to learn how eating and exercise affects diabetes.
- You may also need to learn about medicines and how they control your diabetes.

## Emotional adjustments

Receiving a diagnosis of diabetes will trigger a wide range of feelings. Being aware of your feelings can help you make positive steps in the management of your diabetes and your emotions.

### Common feelings can be:

- Anger – Why me?
- Overwhelmed
- Fear, anxiety
- Shocked
- Denial
- Acceptance
- Confused

Whatever feelings you may experience, it is important to talk about them with your diabetes team.

## Blood glucose and emotions

Changes in your blood glucose levels may change your moods.

- Low blood glucose can cause irritability and nervousness.
- High blood glucose can cause tiredness, which may lead to feelings of depression and listlessness.

Not all negative feelings can be attributed to blood glucose levels; we all have these feelings as we respond to the events in our lives. Be honest with yourself; identify if the feelings are based on your glucose levels or related to something else.

## Hidden nature of diabetes

- Diabetes is an invisible illness; a person may not experience any immediate symptoms from the subtle changes occurring in their body.
- Many people who “feel good” may drift from their routine; they may not be as watchful of what they eat or monitor their blood glucose closely; this relaxed attitude can promote poor diabetes control.
- Staying with your treatment routine requires concentration and a commitment to good health; be patient with yourself; be realistic with yourself; over time, you can improve your health.

Many people feel they are the only ones feeling this way. This is common. Many people struggle with the same feelings and concerns.

## Diabetes is unpredictable

- Diabetes varies from person to person; over your lifetime, you will experience changes in your health related to the diabetes.
- Blood glucose levels may dramatically change without an apparent reason.
  - You need to review your general care guidelines for a possible reason for the change.
  - Increased blood glucose monitoring will help you determine if this change is consistent or temporary.



# Stress management

## What is stress?

- Stress is a natural and important part of life; it is unavoidable.
- Stress is the body’s response to a demand; it is a reaction.
- Everyone reacts differently to stress.
- Our reaction to stress is based on
  - Perceptions of the triggering events and people
  - Expectations and how we handle change
  - Number of stressors we are experiencing
  - Beliefs, goals, and values
- There are major stressors and minor stressors in our lives.
- There is good stress; good stress keeps us alert, motivated to face life’s challenges, and drives us to solve problems.
- Too much stress for too long is “distress”; our body overreacts to events; it leads us into a “flight or fight” response.

## Stress response

Our body responds to stress by sending out stress hormones.

- Stress hormones make your heart beat faster, raise your blood pressure, and make you breathe faster.
- Stress hormones raise your blood glucose levels; this extra glucose gives your brain and muscles more energy, which is used to fight the stress.
- Good stress energizes you to perform well.
- If your body does not have the extra energy to handle the stress, you may feel tired, tense, or have headaches.

## Stress and blood glucose control

- Individuals with diabetes may experience high glucose levels due to stress.
- Stress promotes over or under eating resulting in increased or decreased blood glucose.
- Some people respond to stress with a drop in blood glucose.
- Daily stress may keep blood glucose “bouncing”.
- Some people are less able to cope with stress when blood glucose is out of control.

## Traits leading to more stress

- Perfectionism
- Excessive need for approval
- Tendency to ignore physical and psychological signs of stress

## Warning signs of stress

- Each person has unique and varied signs of stress
- To prevent the build-up of stress, each person must be able to detect their early warning signs of stress as they occur daily
- Stress warning signs can be physical signals, behavior changes, and/or emotional signals



## Physical signals of stress

- |                         |                            |                       |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Sweating palms        | • Fatigue                  | • High blood pressure |
| • Hives                 | • Acne/eczema              | • Itching skin        |
| • Headaches             | • Nausea/vomiting          | • Urinary frequency   |
| • Neck aches            | • Pounding heart           | • Indigestion         |
| • Teeth grinding        | • Irritable bowel          | • Diarrhea            |
| • Ulcers                | • Constipation             | • “Lump in throat”    |
| • Cold sores            | • Cold hands/feet          | • Excessive sweating  |
| • Tics/tremors          | • Hair loss                | • Shortness of breath |
| • Muscle tension/spasms | • Menstrual irregularities |                       |

What warning signs have you experienced with stress?

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## Emotional signs of stress

Behavioral changes or symptoms are actions we make to escape or avoid stress.

- Increased/decreased activity level
- Obsessions
- Increased/decreased appetite
- Accident prone
- Biting fingernails/lips
- Absentmindedness
- Considering/attempting suicide
- Increased drug/alcohol use
- Crying
- Nightmares/recurrent dreams
- Inability to respond sexually
- Excessive sexual drive
- Inability to concentrate
- Increased/decreased need to sleep

What behavioral symptoms have you experienced with stress?

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## Emotional signals of stress

- Depression
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Resentfulness
- Hopelessness
- Poor self-esteem
- Anger
- Fearfulness
- Helplessness
- Hostility
- Irritability
- Exhilaration
- Urge to be alone
- Over-concern with physical health

What signals have you experienced with stress?

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## Stress management skills

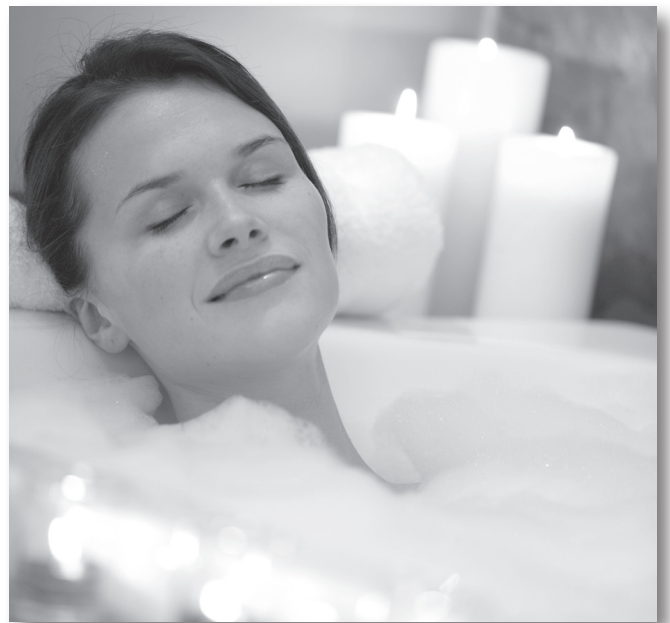
Managing stress requires practice and more practice! Learning the skills to manage your stress will take time. Listed below are skills you may find helpful in managing stress. If you manage stress, you may improve control of your diabetes as well.

- Learn more about diabetes; seek out information and resources.
- Know what you can control and what you cannot.
- Find supportive friends, groups, and/or professionals; share your feelings; talk with others who are facing the same challenges.
- Work for a better balance in your life – allow time for social activities, family fun and hobbies.
- Time management – be realistic with your schedule; know how much you can accomplish; set achievable goals.
- Know what triggers stress for you.
- Try prayer or spiritual assistance.
- Talk positively to yourself.
- Remember to give yourself healthy pleasures.
- Keep humor in your life.
- Try relaxation, deep breathing exercises, or meditation.



## Relaxation techniques

- **Deep breathing exercises**
- **Progressive muscle relaxation** – Close your eyes and slowly breathe. Start with the muscles in your face and slowly work your way down to your toes. Inhale. Tense your eyebrows. Count to 3 and relax. Exhale. Repeat the process...moving from your mouth, to your shoulders, to your arms, to your chest and abdomen, to your muscles in your legs, to your feet and toes. Inhale. Tense the muscle. Count to 3 and then relax. Exhale. Move to the next muscle.
- **Stretching exercises**
- **Visualization/imagery** – Think of peaceful and enjoyable thoughts. Take a “mini-mental vacation”.
- **Concentration/focusing** – Take your mind off your stressor and refocus on something else.
- **Music** – Choose soothing, natural sounds.
- **Bath or soak in a hot tub/sauna**
- **Professional massage**
- **Aromatherapy** – Take a relaxing and calming bath or light scented candles like lavender and chamomile.





## Balancing stress: How well do you do?

<b>How often do you:</b> A: Everyday B: About 3 days a week C: Rarely	A	B	C
Eat healthy .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do physically activity .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get adequate sleep.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use positive self-talk.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Remember to laugh .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give and receive hugs .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How often do you:</b> A: At least 3 to 5 days a week B: Less than 2 days a week C: Rarely	A	B	C
Spend time on your relationships .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>(Examples: Have quality family time, share your feelings with others, participate in social activities)</i>			
Have grounding time .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>(Examples: Spend time alone - "My Time", meditate, journal your thoughts and feelings, participate in a spiritual practice)</i>			
<b>How often do you:</b> A: At least 2 to 3 days a week B: About 1 day a week	A	B	
Work on your hobbies .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>(Examples: Read, garden, woodworking, sewing/crafts)</i>			
Reward yourself.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>(Examples: Get a massage, take a bubble bath, enjoy a candlelight dinner)</i>			
<b>DANGER ZONE</b>			
<b>How often do you:</b> A: Rarely B: Less than 2 days a week C: At least 3 to 5 days a week	A	B	C
Overeat .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over drink.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Withdrawal from others.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feelings of depression.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative self-talk.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The goal is to have "a" for all your answers. If you have answered the questions with "b" or "c", see if you can work on that area to balance your stress.

# Dealing with depression

## What is depression?

- Depression is an emotional state of sadness ranging from mild discouragement to utter hopelessness.
- It is more serious and longer lasting than a temporary “blue mood”; normal variations in mood are part of everyday living.
- The rate of depression in people with diabetes is much higher than the general population.
- Depression affects every part of your life; it can interfere with your family, friends, job, and school.
- Often individuals affected do not recognize the signs.
- Poor blood glucose control may be a sign of depression in people with diabetes; they may not have the energy or motivation to manage their diabetes.

## Signs of depression include

- Anger
- Unhappiness, hopelessness
- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in energy levels
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in favorite or fun activities
- Difficulty making decisions
- Disgust
- Change in personality
- Change in appetite
- Feelings of restlessness
- More sensitive, crying easily
- Abusing or relapse with drugs, alcohol, or tobacco
- Not interested in life

## Taking the first steps to overcome depression

Let someone know how you are feeling. Some people “bottle-up” their feelings. They do not talk about their feelings. Therefore, they do not get the support and help they need.

**Seek help!** Research shows that counseling and/or use of antidepressant medicines can help overcome these feelings of depression. **Seeking help is one of the most important things you can do for yourself!**

## What family and friends can do

### Supporting someone with diabetes

- Encourage often – your encouragement is extremely important.
- Accept their independence and encourage it; but only when they are ready.
- Compliment their progress, particularly as far as attitude is concerned.
- Exercise with them and eat nutritious foods with them.
- Reassure them, especially when they feel angry, anxious, or sad.
- Attend support groups together.
- Search out information to gain a better understanding of diabetes.
- Encourage your friend or partner to participate in decision-making; help them feel they are in control of the situation.
- Remain calm, unemotional, and factually honest when speaking with your loved ones about their diabetes.
- Discuss the situation with someone you trust such as a doctor, diabetes educator, or counselor if you are concerned.
- Be open with family members. Explain the nature of diabetes to children.



Resources are available later in the manual, following Section O.