

Diabetes and Depression

At any given time, most people with diabetes do not have depression. But studies show that people with diabetes have a greater risk of depression than people without diabetes. There is no single answer about why this is true.

The stress of daily diabetes management can build. You may feel alone or set apart from your friends and family because of all this extra work.

If you face diabetes complications such as nerve damage, or if you are having trouble keeping your blood glucose levels where you'd like, you may feel like you're losing control of your diabetes. Even tension between you and your doctor may make you feel frustrated and sad.

If you are depressed and have no energy, chances are you will find such tasks as regular blood glucose testing too much. If you feel so anxious that you can't think straight, it will be hard to keep up with a good diet. You may not feel like eating at all. Of course, this will affect your blood glucose levels.

SPOTTING DEPRESSION

Spotting depression is the first step. Getting help is the second.

If you have been feeling really sad, blue, or down in the dumps, check for these symptoms:

Loss of pleasure — You no longer take interest in doing things you used to enjoy.

Change in sleep patterns — You have trouble falling asleep, you wake often during the night, or you want to sleep more than usual, including during the day.

Early to rise — You wake up earlier than usual and cannot get back to sleep.

Change in appetite — You eat more or less than you used to, resulting in a quick weight gain or weight loss.

Trouble concentrating — You can't watch a TV program or read an article because other thoughts or feelings get in the way.

Loss of energy — You feel tired all the time.

Nervousness — You always feel so anxious you can't sit still.

Guilt — You feel you "never do anything right" and worry that you are a burden to others.

Morning sadness — You feel worse in the morning than you do the rest of the day.

Suicidal thoughts — You feel you want to die or are thinking about ways to hurt yourself.

If you have three or more of these symptoms, or if you have just one or two but have been feeling bad for two weeks or more, it's time to get help.

GETTING HELP

If you are feeling symptoms of depression, don't keep them to yourself. First, talk them over with your doctor. There may be a physical cause for your depression.

Poor control of diabetes can cause symptoms that look like depression. During the day, high or low blood glucose levels may make you feel tired or anxious. Low blood glucose levels can also lead to

hunger and eating too much. If you have low blood glucose at night, it could disturb your sleep. You may get up often to urinate and then feel tired during the day.

Other physical causes of depression can include the following:

- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Thyroid problems
- Side effects from some medications

Do not stop taking a medication without telling your doctor. Your doctor will be able to help you discover if a physical problem is at the root of your sad feelings.

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

If you and your doctor rule out physical causes, your doctor will most likely refer you to a specialist. You might talk with a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse, licensed clinical social worker, or professional counselor. In fact, your doctor may already work with mental health professionals on a diabetes treatment team.

All of these mental health professionals can guide you through the rough waters of depression. In general, there are two types of treatment:

- Psychotherapy, or counseling
- Antidepressant medication

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Psychotherapy with a well-trained therapist can help you look at the problems that bring on depression. It can also help you find ways to relieve the problem. Therapy can be short term or long term. You should be sure you feel at ease with the therapist you choose.

MEDICATION

If you opt for trying an antidepressant drug, talk to your therapist and your primary care provider about side effects, including how it might affect your blood glucose levels. Make sure that the doctors will consult about your care when needed. Many people do well with a combination of medication and psychotherapy.

If you have symptoms of depression, don't wait to get help. If your health care provider cannot refer you to a mental health professional, contact your local psychiatric society or psychiatry department of a medical school, or the local branch of organizations for psychiatric social workers, psychologists, or mental health counselors. Your local American Diabetes Association may also be a good resource for counselors who have worked with people with diabetes.