How Does Stress Affect Diabetes?

by AMY MANLEY

The Relationship Between Stress and Diabetes

With diabetes stress management techniques from Afra.

While managing your diabetes through specific lifestyle changes is essential, managing stress is just as important. Stress takes a terrible toll on the body in general, but when you have diabetes, the impact it has can be even more serious.

By learning more about the relationship between stress and diabetes and ways you can reduce it, you can prevent it from having a negative impact on your quality of life.

How Stress Affects Diabetes

Stress causes a buildup in stress hormones found within the body. When your body is under stress, it can cause your blood sugar levels to rise. Because insulin is used to regulate sugar levels in the body, when the body is under a lot of stress, it may leave the insulin ineffective.

When you experience stress, sugar is excreted from the blood, as the body uses sugar to provide it with a boost of energy, which is produced by the body naturally. This boost of energy was effective many years ago when the body used this response to get out of dangerous situations. While some situations do require the fight or flight response, it is seldom needed in the everyday stressful situations we face now, yet the body still acts naturally.

When you do not have diabetes, the blood sugar rise is quickly maintained by the body, but when diabetes, your body has a hard time getting your sugar levels back down to the normal level.

Understanding the Link between Stress and Diabetes

Stress affects those with diabetes in a few different ways. As mentioned, the effect on blood sugar can cause a lot of serious complications, causing difficulty with management. Additionally, experts say that when stress goes on for a prolonged period of time, it can cause you to stop managing your diabetes properly.

Stress can lead to feelings of depression, fatigue, and similar mental health concerns. When you're under stress, you also tend to eat and drink things that are not healthy, causing you to forget your typical healthy diet. In order to prevent the effect stress has on your diabetes, you need to learn how to properly manage your stress.

Diabetes Stress Management Techniques

So we have established that diabetes can cause stress, but maybe it's not diabetes but life, in general, raising your blood glucose through stress.

Fear not — there are things you can do to help relieve stress or anxiety and improve management of your diabetes. First, find out what is causing your stress!

Most people have at least an inkling but are afraid to face the issue. If it is something big, like health or relationship worries, a good starting point is to talk to your doctor. They can address your physical health concerns or refer you to a counselor for a relationship or mental health concerns.

For financial problems, don't bury your head in the sand. Seek help from your banker or one of the many specialist organizations and charities who can help you take control of debt.

Maybe your issue is something you can sort out relatively easily by yourself. If so, make this a priority; all too often stress-inducing situations grow out of control because it seems easier to ignore them and hope they goes away.

An example of this is an untidy home or office. It sounds so silly, but if piles of paperwork or mail/email building up make you anxious, set time aside to tackle them.

If a work or home project has grown out of your control, ask or pay for help if possible. Or stop and work out a way of making it manageable without adding stress.

Toxic Relationships

Maybe it's a person or people raising your blood pressure and glucose? Friends and family can be a blessing — but also a curse sometimes.

Identify any toxic relationships in your life and, if possible, distance yourself from them. It might be that the person is very close geographically or in your family, but your first priority must be your own health and wellbeing.

Seek the advice of a professional counselor or chat with an objective friend, or simply withdraw yourself from the toxic person/people for a while, citing your health as a reason if necessary.

It might sound stressful to distance yourself from people, but in the long run it might prove easier than pretending everything is fine or tolerating arguments and bad behavior.

Coping With the Day-To-Day

If coping with the day-to-day of living with diabetes is making you anxious or stressed, make a new start with the help of healthcare professionals if necessary.

Explore new diabetes-friendly recipes if you are bored of eating the same things, change your route if you cannot resist the fast food franchise or bakery on the way home, or ask your partner or friend to join you in a new healthy living campaign.

Exercise is a known stress-buster so you could kill two birds with one stone. Take up walking, swimming, join a gym, or find a class and as well as lifting your mood, the exercise should lower your blood glucose.

Always check with your diabetes specialist before starting any new diet or exercise regime. They will be able to advise you on whether it is suitable for you and guide you if changes to medication are necessary.

My favorite stress relief involves a bit of pampering. It could be something as cheap and simple as a new outfit, earrings, nail polish, an interesting book or magazine and some "me-time."

You could even start saving for a mini-break or even a vacation. Whether your ideal stress-reducing holiday involves skiing, walking or relaxing on a beach, planning the break could be as helpful for reducing anxiety as the break itself, distracting you from everyday stresses.

You could put the money saved by cutting down or giving up cigarettes or junk food into a special bank account. It could soon build up into a significant amount to be spent on the vacation, or something to lower stress levels. Only you know what that might be – new golf clubs? A foot spa? A new computer?

Other quick tips you can follow to beat stress:

- Learn to say no sometimes
- Make sure you get enough sleep
- Don’t be a martyr by soldiering on when you are ill
- Avoid trying to tackle stress with nicotine, alcohol or non-prescribed drugs.

Sometimes all that needs to be done is to realize that “it is what it is.” We don’t always have control over all aspects of our life and there might be times when it is less stressful to accept this, rather than battle on hoping to change the unchangeable.