The Importance of Persistence With Diabetes Treatment

by ERIC PATTERSON

Persistence With Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is a chronic medical condition. For many with the disease, they are able to accept the medical aspect. They understand that monitoring diet, tracking exercise, and testing blood sugar are essential tasks to avoid complications that can present later.

The problems begin to arise when focus is turned towards the chronic facet of the disease. Diabetes is truly a marathon, not a sprint. It doesn't matter that you ate really well for 23 hours of the day because it only takes one bad meal or snack to throw you off track. It doesn't matter that you checked your blood sugar in the morning if you neglected to do so in the afternoon. And it doesn't matter that you attended all of your doctor appointments this year, except for those three you missed.

The level of focus, attention to detail and follow-through needed to minimize the unwanted effects of diabetes really set it apart from other chronic conditions. At least with others, you can have days or hours of breaks. With diabetes you must be vigilant constantly. Vigilance can be exhausting but refusing to do so is dangerous.

For you, the key is persistence. Persistence is the drive and determination to continue on with a plan or course of action in spite of the resistance, difficulty and opposition you receive. Persistence is what turns the sprint into the marathon. Do you want to persist with diabetes? Here's how:

Set Your Goals

Is it your goal to effectively treat your diabetes? This question may sound overly simple, but think about it for a moment. Since your diagnosis, you have had doctors, friends, family and your spouse tell you what you needed to do. They tell you what to eat and when to eat it. They tell you to exercise and change your habits. They hound you about checking your sugar.

In the whirlwind that follows a diagnosis, it is easy to lose track of what you want to do and what your goals are. When other people tell you what to do, it is natural for you to become slightly reluctant or ambivalent regarding your treatment. You may act like a defiant teenager, since no one likes being forced into anything.

But if you are not committed to the treatment, you cannot be persistent. Without persistence, you cannot find success. This is why setting your own goal is the best place to start.

Take time to think about what you want and how you would like to proceed. What are your diabetes treatment goals? How are you going to accomplish them? Be sure to keep goals grounded in reality by removing denial. Since you cannot undo the diabetes diagnosis, your goal should focus on ways to maintain or improve your happiness and quality of life.

Track Your Changes

You are not a diabetes-fighting machine. No one expects you to be one. Because you are human, you are going to experience some ordinary fluctuation in your desire to stick to your diet, exercise plan and blood sugar tracking. The worst thing that you can do is ignore these changes. Ignoring allows the problem to grow and morph without you having the opportunity or awareness to address it.

Pay attention to yourself and be mindful about how invested you are in your treatment today. Honesty is the key component here. If you cannot be honest with yourself, how can you possibly be honest with your doctors, friends and family? Use a simple tracking sheet to understand days that are a struggle and compare them to days that you can find persistence easily. Take your data and look for trends or patterns that can be resolved.

Tell on Yourself

Perhaps, your tracking has indicated that you are having a bad day. Your energy is low. Your motivation is low, and it seems easier to do whatever you want rather than follow your treatment plan. At this point, you have options. The first is to keep this information to yourself. Surely, this will cause your symptoms to grow out of control as your persistence shrinks away. The second is to tell on yourself.

The second option sounds negative, but telling on yourself is such a fantastic thing to do when your thoughts, feelings and behaviors are pulling you towards an undesirable outcome. During this process, you call, text or reach out to a predetermined group of people and let them know what situations are preventing you from taking care of your diabetes today. From here, they can provide you with the information and motivation needed to get your self-care restarted.

Telling on yourself is not an admission of failure or a way to have other people take care of you. Instead, it is an acknowledgment of the idea that managing diabetes day in and day out is a challenging endeavor, sometimes you need some help. Telling on yourself is like radioing in to your pit crew to tell them your car isn’t handling too well. There is no shame in a tune-up.

Next page: More ways to be persistent with diabetes.

Employ Your Support

The previous section was an example of using supports for damage control. Supports are equally useful in situations where you are looking to increase prevention. Prevention is a good way to build a buffer separating you from diabetes burn out. A thin buffer provides less cushioning and is more vulnerable to situational stresses like a bad reading on a test. A thick buffer can cushion you from even the biggest falls.

The way to add to your buffer is easy; just do things that you enjoy with people you like. Your supports can be people, places, things and any combination of the three. Spending time engaged in supports will provide you some time away from the stress and tension of diabetes and make you feel like a well-rounded person again. When you return, you will have a fresh perspective and renewed energy to remain persistent.

Employ New Technology

If you are reading this, you have internet access. It is also safe to assume that many of you have smartphones. Interestingly enough, the usefulness of smartphones extends past their ability to keep you distracted for hours as you scroll through social media and play your newest addictive game. App makers are continually bringing out more sophisticated and helpful apps to manage your diabetes symptoms. If your symptoms feel less overwhelming and more controllable, you will be more likely to maintain your persistence.

Check the app store for some options that sound like they could be beneficial for you. If you have already checked, check back regularly. New apps are coming out all the time that work to integrate numerous features into a centralized location. This convergence saves you time and energy.

Consider a new app available for Apple products. On the day that the masses were learning more about connected watches and new laptops, information regarding medical research and diabetes care went mostly unnoticed. An app called GlucoSuccess was unveiled as a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital. The goal of the app is to understand the balance between diet, physical activity, and medications, and how, in turn, these affect blood sugar. What makes this app different is that it allows you to send your data to researchers studying diabetes to aid in their efforts to find better treatment and better results. Do your own research to see if the app might be right for you.

Seek Therapy

Depression is a major concern for people with diabetes as the loss of control, change in self-perception and modification of old habits can bring about sadness. As depression increases, it will work to sway your from your persistence. After all, a less-healthy you is a more depressed you. Unless you can target your depression and other mental health concerns directly, you cannot address you diabetes.

When seeking a qualified therapist, be sure to inquire about their theoretical orientation and experience with diabetes. Their theoretical orientation pertains to the type of therapy they are trained in and their mental health philosophy. Research has shown that people with diabetes seem to get more positive results when they work with a therapist trained in cognitive-behavioral therapy.

This orientation focuses on the idea that thoughts, feelings and behaviors are all connected and influence one another. This therapist can provide tips and insight to help you become more efficient and motivated with your diabetes treatment while lowering your mental health symptoms. Efficacy maintains the persistence you need so badly.

Conclusion

Maintaining persistence in the face of diabetes is no easy task. In fact, it is quite grueling, demanding and frustrating. Treating your diabetes cannot be a “sometimes” task. For the best results, your medical condition needs to be in the front of your mind. Follow the tips above to avoid burnout and guarantee that your persistence persists for years to come.