How Diabetes Causes Mood Swings (and What to Do About It)

by REBECCA PACIOREK

Diabetes Mood Swings: The Roller Coaster You Don’t Want to Ride

All of a sudden you feel it: your teeth are clenched, your blood is boiling and you wonder if people can see the smoke coming out your ears. Is it possible that type 2 diabetes caused this sudden mood change?

Yes. Not only can diabetes be responsible for mood changes, but it can take a toll on your emotions in general.

From anger to depression to anxiety, diabetes can take you across a spectrum of feelings. This roller coaster can leave you just plain exhausted. Let’s take a look first at the feelings and possible causes and then in some ways to cope with diabetes mood swings.

Anger

A common feeling, whether you’ve just been diagnosed or had diabetes for years, is anger. Not only are many diabetics angry at being diagnosed with the disease and ask “Why me?” but they are also made to feel guilty that their own lifestyle choices have led them to this diagnosis.

This can build up and start to cause resentment problems in the relationships with those that may not be as supportive as they could be.

Depression

There are many reasons those of us with diabetes can feel depressed. With a diabetes diagnosis comes the need for many lifestyle changes — and that is not an easy task.

If you are someone who never really paid attention to what you ate and didn’t have a set exercise routine, you will find the new requirements of counting carbs and getting some exercise in to be a bit daunting at first.

Many people will also be unhappy with having to take medicines and the fact that these medicines may have unwanted side effects such as sexual dysfunction and digestion issues. The burden alone of the daily management of diabetes can be a cause of depression.

Anxiety

Anxiety is also common among people with a chronic illness such as diabetes. You might be a stress eater or have concerns about the costs associated with diabetes.

You may also worry about how having diabetes will affect your family, your children and your future health. Let’s face it, all the complications and risks of having diabetes are quite scary and can certainly make anyone feel anxious.

Fatigue

All of these feelings, fears and the emotional roller coaster ride can lead to additional issues such as sleeplessness and general fatigue. Diabetes fatigue is a struggle — dealing with a chronic illness is just plain exhausting.

Medical Reasons for Mood Swings

As we saw above, there are many thoughts and feelings that go into having diabetes. While all of this can cause feelings of anxiousness and depression, there are physical causes of possible mood swings that you need to be aware of as well.

Low glucose levels (even just a low for you but still in the normal range) can cause a variety of symptoms including moodiness, anxiety, fatigue, confusion, dizziness, and blurred vision.

High readings for you, but still in the normal range, can also be a cause for similar symptoms. These highs and lows and the symptoms associated with them are why the goal for diabetics is to work with your doctor for a diet and medicine plan that will keep sugar readings as level as possible throughout the day.

Research has also shown that if you go for long periods with high blood sugar levels it can trigger the production of a hormone that has been linked to causing depression. So, when you take all the already emotional feelings surrounding diabetes and combine those with the physical reasons for mood swings, you can see why a diabetic may snap from time to time.

But, surely there has to be something to help all this of mental mess?

Yes, there are several things you can do to try and keep all of these balls juggling without hitting the ground. The following are our top six suggestions to keep mood swings at bay:

- **Work hard at a balanced carb diet**. This will differ for each individual so be sure to talk to your doctor or dietician to understand what they are expecting from you.
- **Keep an emergency pack with you at all times in case of low blood sugar.** This can come in the form of a granola bar, hard candy or glucose tablets. I keep some in my car and in my purse just in case I get stuck in traffic or at an appointment and can feel myself crashing.
- **Get off the couch.** Seriously, if you have diabetes, it's IMPERATIVE to incorporate some type of exercise into your day. Start slowly if you have to — even just walking in place in front of the TV will make a difference. If you're tech-savvy, get a Fitbit or other step tracker. It's fun to challenge your friends (and yourself) and see what you can do.
- **Yoga, meditation and mindfulness are really helpful at calming your emotions.** There are many free meditation videos available on YouTube.
- **Track your sugar levels.** If you are catching yourself in a mood and you know it, take the time to take a reading. If you can get a handle on whether you are going too low or too high in your counts, it will give you a better idea of how to solve the problem.
- **Talk to your doctor.** If you are finding mood swings and feelings of depression/anxiety taking over your day, it might be time to get professional intercession. Your doctor can help you determine if your diet might be to blame, or if you need some depression medications, and they may even point you to a counselor to help you sort out your feelings.

Yes, diabetes is a burden and not an easy one to bare. But with education, careful planning, and some creative solutions, you can tackle the emotional roller coaster and ride with your hands up.