How Does Diabetes Affect You Emotionally?

by REBECCA PACIOREK

Diabetes and Emotions: The Emotional Roller Coaster of Diabetes

One minute I'm feeling fine and the next, "grrrrr" and everything is irritating me. What's going on? I do a quick mental calendar check. Nope, it's not PMS. Ding! The light goes off, and I realize it's been a while since I've eaten anything.

When you have diabetes, keeping your blood glucose levels balanced across the day is the main way to prevent this from happening. Typically, I eat at least "a little something" every few hours. Your doctor will suggest a good plan for you.

Let's take a look at this emotional aspect of having diabetes and what that can look like, and tips for managing diabetes and emotions together.

How Does Type 2 Diabetes Affect Your Social Life?

The mood swings that can come along with diabetes can be hard to take for those around you, especially if they aren't in the know.

With type 2 diabetes, we are mostly referring to low blood sugar causing this. If your sugars drop, it can cause you to become distracted, easily agitated and just downright cranky. You might find yourself snapping at those that you love most.

If you aren't able to solve the problem and your loved ones aren't educated about this potential effect, you might find yourself being invited to fewer parties and events, and withdrawing from some of your normal activities. Don't let this happen!

Every person with diabetes can be caught off guard now and then and have a sugar drop so be sure to educate those around you. Let them know what to do if this happens (remind you to grab a snack or glucose tab) and ask them to be patient with you. If they know what's going on, they can cheer you on when it comes to taking care of yourself, and they can also be on the lookout for your safety.

How Does Diabetes Affect Your Mental Health?

According to the American Diabetes Association and various others, "studies show that people with diabetes have a greater risk of depression than people without diabetes." It has not yet been determined if the depression causes diabetes or diabetes causes the depression because it's a bit of a catch 22.

Having diabetes can be stressful to deal with. That could cause you to become depressed after time. But, on the other hand, if you have depression, you could be less likely to take care of yourself causing a vicious circle.

Georgetown University clinical psychologist, Stacey Kaltman, PhD., did a study on treating depression and diabetes together. She found that most doctors tend to treat the symptoms separately when, in actuality, they often go hand in hand. By treating the two together, she saw the result to be a much better outcome for the patient.

Many of the things you'll see in the next section on treatment are actually things that tend to work for both conditions so it makes sense to treat them together.

How Do I Know If I Have Depression Over My Diabetes?

What a great question. Everyone gets a little blue or down in the dumps now and then. That's not what we're talking about here. If you have some of these classic symptoms for several weeks and just can't seem to shake the blues, it's time to ask for some extra help:

- Loss of interest in things you usually like to do
- Trouble sleeping or waking up and not being able to get back to sleep
- A sense of nervousness or lack of concentration
- Changes in your eating habits like eating too much or not much at all
- Thoughts of suicide - this one is an instant red flag.

Treatment for Depression

Once a person is evaluated as having depression with their diabetes, it's time to create a plan of action to get them back to enjoying life again. Here are some of the things that might happen:

- **Psychotherapy/counseling.** Many people with diabetes find that just talking it out with a counselor can help them to put things into a better perspective and learn how to cope with all these feelings.
- **Medication.** Just as you take medications for actual diabetes, there are also various medications that can be added to your routine to help with your mood. This is where you may be referred to a Psychiatrist to find the best mix of medicines for your particular situation.

Tips for Easing Stress

Having any chronic illness is stressful and can be tiring. These tips for easing the stress of chronic illness will also help if you have depression:

- **Yoga and Meditation.** In the last year "mindfulness" has been a hot topic. Free meditation apps like Calm and Headspace can teach you how to meditate for a better life. Yoga is also known to be very calming.
- **Exercise.** Exercising is known to help ease stress and keep blood sugars under control.
- **Diet.** is also helpful for both mood and sugars. Better foods are better for your brain and can help keep that serotonin and dopamine where it can help keep you happier.

Having a chronic illness like type 2 diabetes is tough. But, knowing how to keep your emotions and check and what to do if you can't do it alone, can go a long way to easing the stressful side of diabetes so you can spend your time on other more important things in life. If you have any tips on elevating mood when you have diabetes, we'd love to hear them. Feel free to share in the comments below.