# Why You Should Consider Joining a Diabetes Support Group

by COLLEEN KELLY

## Diabetes Support Groups

Has your physician asked you to find a support group to cope with your diagnosis?

I've had numerous patients ask me about support groups. "Would a diabetic support group be right for me?" they ask. "Why not?" I reply. The name itself implies that it offers assistance or encouragement – and that can be helpful to anyone, regardless of the chronic condition that you suffer from.

The trick sometimes is *finding* a support group that *fits* your needs.

For example, a support group meant for parents or caregivers of type 1 diabetic children will not be a great fit for adults with type 2 diabetes. Nor will a support group for athletes with type 1 diabetes be a great fit for adults with type 2 diabetes who have been newly diagnosed.

Let's look at support groups.

### What Is a Support Group?

A support group brings a like-minded group of individuals. These individuals are likely very different – they may be different ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds – but they are facing a common issue, such as an illness, a relationship problem, or a big life change.

A support group is *not* a replacement for therapy. If your physician has prescribed therapy as a treatment for dealing with your diabetes (or other chronic health condition), going to a support group may be helpful, but it may not provide enough mental health treatment. While a mental health professional may lead them, they also may be led by a layperson – meaning, by a person who does not have a mental health background, such as another individual with diabetes or a family member of someone with diabetes.

A support group may be in person. A traditional support group is often in person. However, they are also increasingly found on the internet – on a website or on Facebook, for example.

### What Are the Benefits of a Support Group?

The benefits of a support group are going to be multifaceted, but subjective to the person in the group. This means that each person is going to get something different from the group – and it also means that if the group isn't all that "great," the benefit may not be that great either!

However, the point of a support group is for people to share experiences and to offer advice. Some groups do have speakers about specific topics that relate to the group's needs. In general, the group emphasizes support – so the entire experience is tailored to what will benefit the group as a whole.

The benefits that you may note from joint a support group, whether it is in person or online, include:

- Improving coping skills.
- Feeling less lonely and less judged.
- Gaining empowerment and feeling more in control of your own situation.
- Being able to talk openly about your situation when you perhaps didn't feel you could with your family or friends.
- A reduction in stress.
- A reduction in anxiety and depression.
- Developing a clearer understanding of your own situation.
- Asking advice about treatment information.
- Comparing notes about your treatments and doctors.

**How to Find a Diabetes Support Group: Locally and Online**

Many people are seeking a face-to-face support group because they enjoy the social interaction of a "real" support group. One of the best ways to find a local support group is to ask your physician's office! They often have information about support groups.

If your physician doesn't have any information about support groups, contact your local diabetes educator. It is also likely that she has information about support groups.

You can also pull out the newspaper. Support groups often post ads in the newspaper weekly as to when their meetings will be happening – and where!

And if you know other people with diabetes – ask them! You may not have heard them discuss a support group, but that doesn't mean that they aren't aware of a support group. Maybe they're a member of a group or know of one. Don't be afraid to network.

If you're interested in finding an online group, because your schedule doesn't allow for a face-to-face group, or because you prefer a little anonymity, you can head to Google and do a little search. Google can allow you to search for a specific group. For example, if you're looking for a group that is specific to your needs.

And last but not least – do not forget Facebook! Facebook has many online support groups, and you can find some very, very specific groups. Seeking a group that has diabetic-friendly recipes? Check! Seeking a group for people with diabetes who want to lose weight? Check!

**The Bottom Line…**

A support group – whether in person or online – can be a great tool, a supportive group of people, and a place to network with other individuals.