# How Does Type 1 Diabetes Affect Your Mental Health?

by ABIGAIL DAVID

## The Relationship Between Type 1 Diabetes and Mental Health

Living with a chronic illness is arguably one of the most mentally taxing things a human can experience. Not only does it never go away, it never plateaus or stays the same.

In the case of type 1 diabetes, a person can live the exact same way every day and their blood sugars will always be different. Having type 1 diabetes is a constant balancing act and takes a ton of time and effort to get under control. It is completely self-managed therefore any decisions resulting in negative outcomes can induce guilt, shame, hopelessness, and many other negative feelings. It's no wonder so many people with type 1 diabetes suffer from a variety of mental health issues.

As someone who lives with type 1 diabetes, I can, at times, feel like I'm trapped in a bad dream wondering when I wake up – the answer is never. Figuring out how to be okay with it never going away and being able to get myself out of that negative mindset has been something I've been working on since my diagnosis. Living freely and deeply happy in conjunction with type 1 diabetes has taken me so much time, self-exploration and research.

One thing I've always focused on with my management is not letting diabetes hold me back from living my dreams, whether that has meant giving it more attention at certain times or trusting my instincts and learning to let go of perfection. Mentally balancing type 1 diabetes has been a much bigger feat for me than physically balancing my blood sugar levels. It's taken me eight years to get to a really good place mentally with type 1 diabetes.

### How to Cope With Diabetes and Mental Health

Here is a list of the most impactful things that helped me get to where I am at today.

#### Accepting Your Diagnosis and Mental Health

This step is most definitely the hardest one. It's not going to happen overnight.

It's going to take a lot of meditating on the fact that you have a new more complicated life to get to the point of total acceptance. Also, it's going to take adjusting to your new body and lifestyle and letting go of the "freedoms" you used to have. Ultimately, true acceptance will set you free and allow you to get back to feeling like yourself.

Personal pro-tip, the doctors or clinic may tell you, "Oh, in five years there will be a cure" or something along those lines. Don't hold onto that information, they've been saying that kind of thing for the past 30 years, and there is still no cure. They are telling you this to comfort you, but I know from experience that those promises do more harm the help.

Let go, let go, let go… and then move on.

**Put Yourself First**

Your health and personal needs are important. Having type 1 diabetes takes up a lot of extra headspace, so make sure you are giving yourself the proper care you need.

Take extra time getting to places, reduce stress, and make an effort to figure out a diet and exercise plan that works for your body. Do your research and find out how you will need to adjust your life slightly while still enjoying the things you love.

Dedicate time to your diabetes care in terms of basal rates and bolus ratios. Having decent blood sugar levels will help your brain feel more calm and level. Blood sugar directly affects mood and overall wellness; getting a good handle on is key.

**Talk About It**

Type 1 diabetes can be incredibly isolating and can seriously take a mental toll. It is so healthy to open up and express how you are feeling about things.

Seeing a therapist or counselor is normal and encouraged. If a therapist is not accessible to you reach out to friends and family, they love you and want to help, they may not understand at all what you're going through but having a human ear listen to your thoughts is always comforting.

**Don't Give Up Your Passions or Hobbies**

Seriously, this is something I did, and I completely lost sight of who I was. Yes, a huge part of your life is different now but not all of it. Those passions and hobbies of yours don't have to change, and they will keep you sane and keep you connected to yourself pre-diagnosis.

Personally, I got so caught up in managing my type 1 diabetes that I lost sight of what I loved. I gained new passions along the way, but it wasn't until I returned to my old ones and reincorporated them into my life that I felt fulfilled again.

**Find Your Tribe**

Connect with other diabetics, and they will become some of your closest friends. It is so hard to understand what it's like to live with type 1 diabetes if you don't live it yourself, having a friend who has diabetes may be the tipping point for maintaining some level of sanity.

My world completely changed when I made a type 1 diabetic friend, all of a sudden I wasn't alone anymore and could talk to someone who completely understood my reality. Many big diabetes organizations have local meetups posted on their website, or you can always search the hashtag #type1diabetes or #t1d on Instagram and join the diabetes Instagram community!

**Focus on the Positive**

It's easy to get caught up in all the things diabetes has taken from your life, and it's important to try and remind yourself of the positives it has brought as well. Whether it be a new knowledge of food and nutrition, a better sense of self, living a more down to earth lifestyle or good friends, it's always good to remind yourself of what you have gained.

**The Takeaway**

As you can see, living with type 1 diabetes and mental health issues are more than just balancing blood sugar, it's a total life adjustment. Thankfully, it is extremely responsive to good care, and if the effort is put it, it's possible to reach of point of peaceful co-existence.