

# Adjusting to life with diabetes

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The diagnosis of diabetes can come as a shock. First reactions may be disbelief, sadness, anger or self-blame. Usually these feelings ease after a while and diabetes becomes part of life. But sometimes these feelings don't go away easily. If you feel this way, you are not alone. There are many things you can do to fit diabetes into your life.

“It was really scary because I didn't know much about it, I just had this whole perception that it's really bad and I remember asking myself, 'Why me?'.”

Sandra, 27, person with diabetes



# Life with diabetes

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It's common for people to go through emotional ups and downs after diabetes is diagnosed. People may experience disbelief, grief, guilt, anger, fear and sadness. Others may have a sense of relief that they now have an explanation for how they've been feeling, both physically and emotionally.

At first you may feel down about having diabetes and uncertain or fearful about how it's going to change your life. That's natural. It takes time to learn how to manage diabetes and fit it into your life.

But it becomes a serious problem when these emotions start to impact on daily life or how you manage your diabetes. For example if you are:

- avoiding medical appointments because you can't cope with the diagnosis
- checking blood sugar levels excessively (or not checking) due to worries
- blaming yourself (or others) for your diabetes or when things don't go well.

If you think you're having problems adjusting to life with diabetes, talk with your healthcare professional. They will assess the problem and help you work out strategies for living well with diabetes.

## What you can do

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Whether or not you feel distressed about your diabetes diagnosis, it's important to look after your emotional wellbeing.

Adjustment is an ongoing process, so it's essential for you to take care of yourself throughout life with diabetes.

Some of the following ideas may work for you – others may not, and that's okay. They may give you more ideas about other things you could try.

### Be informed

Understanding the basics of diabetes is a first and necessary step to managing and living well with diabetes. Take your time and gather information at your own pace.

A good place to start is by talking with your healthcare professionals. Or get in touch with us – you can call our helpline on **0345 123 2399** or visit our website **[www.diabetes.org.uk/newly-diagnosed](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/newly-diagnosed)**

Take care when searching the internet for medical advice. It's important to use reliable sources, and that's where we come in.

### Ask questions

At first you may feel overwhelmed with all the information you get and with learning new skills to manage your diabetes. Sometimes people find that writing a list of questions and concerns is a useful way of getting a better understanding of diabetes.

Bring this list along to your next diabetes appointment, so that you don't forget the questions or concerns you want to talk over with your healthcare professional.

You may not remember everything that has been said during the previous consultation. If you're unsure, ask again next time. Your healthcare professional will appreciate your questions, as it will help them to offer you the best support.

### Learn from the experts

Experts are not only healthcare professionals. Other people like you are also experts – in living with diabetes. Often the most practical support you will get is from people who understand what it's like to live with diabetes. It can be reassuring to know that other people face similar challenges and to share ideas about how to cope with them.

Join a support group or an online community, like our online support forum at **[www.diabetes.org.uk/forum](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/forum)**

### Write it down

You might also like to note down your feelings in a diary. This can be a powerful way of understanding and dealing with some of your emotions.

You might surprise yourself with what you write down. This can be a private diary, or you may choose to share it with a friend or your healthcare professional. It's completely up to you.

## Include your family and friends

You don't have to go through this alone.

If you feel comfortable, let your family and friends know how you feel so they can support you. Communicate how much you want them to be involved in your diabetes management and invite them to share their feelings too. You might like to say things like:

- 'I'm still the same person I was before the diabetes.'
- 'I know I don't look ill, but sometimes I may not feel great.'
- 'Diabetes is an invisible illness, which means you can't always see my symptoms, but they are very real.'

Not all of your family and friends will know how to respond to your emotions, and they may even be uncomfortable seeing you feeling hurt. Don't let that stop you from opening up.

Some people are better at supporting in more practical ways. For example, you may find that they can help you to make healthy food choices, get more physically active, or be considerate about your need to check your blood sugar level or inject insulin.

Remember, it's completely up to you who you choose to involve in your diabetes.

## Make a plan

Developing a plan for your health care – including your emotional health – is essential. Start small and work your way up. You might like to include your family or friends in this process too. Here are some tips to help get you started:

- Make an appointment with your healthcare professional to talk about your diabetes and any questions or concerns you have.
- Get information about things like medication, insulin, nutrition, events and support groups.
- Talk to trusted family and friends about your diabetes.
- Connect with other people living with diabetes.
- Talk to your school or employer about your current issues, if it seems helpful, then work with them to achieve the best results.

- Plan regular physical activity.
- Plan social activities – make sure you have fun. Diabetes is just one aspect of your life, so don't let it take over.

## Talk with a professional

These ideas may help you adjust to life with diabetes. But they can't replace professional help. It's always a good idea to talk about your concerns with your healthcare team.

## Who can help?

### Your diabetes healthcare professionals

Your diabetes healthcare team is there to help you with all aspects of your diabetes, including how you feel about it. If you feel comfortable, share your feelings with them – they will give you non-judgemental support and advice. You may want to talk with any of the following professionals:

- general practitioner (GP)
- diabetologist (consultant)
- diabetes specialist nurse
- practice nurse
- dietitian.

**"I think it's taken a long time to realise what it means to have diabetes and what it means for me to live with it and cope with it effectively, and that will probably be a much longer term learning process for me."**

Mark, 42, person with diabetes

Bring this leaflet along to your consultation to help get the conversation started. You will probably feel relieved after sharing your feelings, and it will help your health professional to understand how you are feeling.

Together, you can make plans to reduce your distress or concerns. For example, your healthcare professional can refer you to diabetes information sessions or peer support groups.

You should be invited to attend a structured diabetes education session – learning more about diabetes can help you live well with the condition.

There may be group, one to one or online education sessions available in your area.

Ask your healthcare professional for our leaflet on peer support, or contact us for more information.

### Psychological specialists

You might also like to talk with a psychological specialist. They'll help you find ways to cope and adjust to life with diabetes.

You can find help from your local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) team. Ask your diabetes team to refer you, or contact them directly by searching online for 'IAPT' and your local area name.

## More information and support

There are lots of different sources of information and support. Talk with your healthcare professional team about which ones might be right for you.

### How we help

#### Diabetes UK

We're fighting for a world where diabetes can do no harm. And as the UK's leading diabetes charity, it's our job to tackle the diabetes crisis. We provide information, advice and support to people with all types of diabetes so they can learn to live well with their condition. And we bring people together so they can learn from each other and get to grips with diabetes.

Visit our website [www.diabetes.org.uk/newly-diagnosed](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/newly-diagnosed)

Our helpline is managed by trained counsellors there to listen, give support and answer questions. Call **0345 123 2399**

You can meet other people with diabetes at one of our local support groups.

Visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/support-groups](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/support-groups)

Or chat to others online in our support forum at [www.diabetes.org.uk/forum](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/forum)

And if you're on social media, join our online community on Facebook or follow us at **@DiabetesUK** on Twitter.

Your healthcare professional will be able to give you details of local peer support events and organisations too.