

Diabetes distress

Diabetes can be really tough to live with. Sometimes people feel distressed, which can include feeling frustrated, guilty, sad, or worried. It is understandable if you feel this way from time to time – you're not alone. There are many things you can do to reduce your diabetes distress.

“I think the hardest thing was as soon as you start checking your sugars and you don't watch them go down, that just becomes blow after blow every day. It's not something you deal with every three months when you get your blood test result, it's something you're dealing with on a daily basis, so it's taken me a long time to get used to doing sugar readings and accepting them.”

Marianne, 62, person with diabetes



What is diabetes distress?

Diabetes distress is the emotional burden of living with and managing diabetes.

For example, you may feel:

- overwhelmed by the demands of living with diabetes
- that you're failing with your diabetes management
- worried about your risk of long-term complications
- frustrated that you can't predict or control diabetes from one day to the next
- guilty when your diabetes management gets off track.

Diabetes distress becomes a serious problem when these emotions start to impact on daily life, including work, school, relationships, and diabetes management.

If diabetes distress is not managed, it can get worse over time. It may lead to burnout – this is when a person feels emotionally exhausted and overwhelmed by the demands of their diabetes and tries to cope with this by giving up on taking care of their diabetes.

If you think you're experiencing diabetes distress, talk with your healthcare professional. They'll assess the problem and help you work out ways to manage your distress.

What you can do

Whether or not you're experiencing distress about your diabetes, it's important to look after your emotional wellbeing.

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

Stop blaming yourself

Diabetes can be hard to manage, and there is never a perfect relationship between the effort you put in and the results you get. You may have unrealistically high (or low) expectations of yourself and your diabetes.

Sometimes, people feel like they are failing with their diabetes. Remember, your blood sugar level is just a number, not a reflection of who you are.

- Let go of expectations that may be too high and focus instead on doing the things that you can achieve.
- Use phrases like 'high' or 'low' blood sugar, instead of 'good' or 'bad', to avoid thinking badly of yourself.

It's about finding the balance between managing diabetes well and living your life.

Start being kind to yourself

It's hard to take care of yourself when you're feeling down or frustrated. Being kind to yourself is a great way to improve your wellbeing. For example, have a relaxing bath, treat yourself to a massage or listen to music you enjoy.

When you feel distressed about your diabetes, you might also like to imagine what you might say to a close friend with the same struggles. Compare this to how you normally respond to yourself in these situations. Are you being harder on yourself than you would be on a friend? Follow the advice you'd give to your friend instead.

Take a break

If you feel completely fed up with your diabetes, taking a break might help. While you can't completely ignore your diabetes, taking a break means that you spend a bit less time and energy on it for a short while (maybe a week or two).

Talk with your healthcare professional before making changes to your diabetes management routine. Explain why you need a break and ask them to help you to plan your break safely. They'll be glad you asked.

Re-assess your goals

If you feel like you're not achieving your goals with your diabetes, consider setting one or two smaller goals to help increase your confidence. Getting some quick wins may help you feel better.

For example, you might consider the following goal: 'I'm going to go to all my diabetes-related appointments in the next year.' This goal is specific and measurable, which is a good thing. It also needs to be realistic for you, otherwise there is no point. Keeping your appointments will mean you get the support you need.

Get connected

Talking things through with others can be a big help. You might like to talk with your family or friends about how you feel, and how they can support you.

It may also help to talk with others 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.

Our [online forum](#) is a great place to talk about your diabetes, with loads of people ready to chat. You can always call our [helpline](#) too, if you need someone to talk to.

"I think it's that realisation that you're not alone, that there are unfortunately quite a lot of other people around who have got the same issues and face the same problems as you do day in and day out. It can give you, I guess, not a positive feeling but you know in the back of your mind, it's okay, I'm not isolated, I'm not doing this alone."

Jake, 41, person with diabetes

Talk with a professional

These are just a few ideas about how to prevent or reduce diabetes distress. 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 team

Your diabetes team are 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'll give you non-judgmental support and advice.

You may want to talk with your:

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

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

Together, you can make plans to reduce your distress. For example, your healthcare professional can help you safely make some small changes to your diabetes care so it feels less of a burden.

You might like to attend a structured diabetes education session – learning more about diabetes can help with overcoming frustrations.

There may be group education sessions 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/diabetes-burnout

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

Or chat to others online in our support forum at 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.