

DiABETES UK
KNOW DIABETES. FIGHT DIABETES.

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Opening up a conversation

Starting a conversation about emotional health can sometimes feel challenging for both you and your patient. Here are some of our tips.

Ask “how are you feeling?”

- Ask this at every appointment.
- Take the time, wait for them to answer and be comfortable with silence.
- Listen to the response.
- Try different approaches with different people. There may be creative ways to ask this.

Don't always take 'fine' on face value

Here are some ways people might describe how they're feeling that might indicate there are other things going on.

- Tired/having problems sleeping.
- Feeling fed up.
- "I can't be bothered".
- Physical symptoms – headaches, stomach aches.
- Feeling overwhelmed or struggling with their diabetes management.

See the person, not just their diabetes

Ask them about:

- Favourite football team or hobby.
- University course.
- What's important to them outside of their diabetes.

Collaborative agenda setting

Try asking:

- "What would you like to discuss today?"

2

Making the most of the conversation

Once you've opened up the conversation it can feel difficult to continue. Here are some tips on making sure the conversation is effective.

Use open questions

For example:

- Instead of asking “are you experiencing any difficulties” try “what difficulties are you experiencing?”

Reflect what your patient has told you

For example:

- “From what I understand...”
- “I hear that you're saying...”
- “It sounds like...”
- “Have I understood what you mean?”

Be inquisitive

- What is important to your patient?
- What do they want to happen next?
- What is there in your wider service that could help?

Use our information prescriptions

Our information prescriptions can help structure a conversation and create a care plan.

www.diabetes.org.uk/IP-Prof

Think about your language

Sometimes what you say may be interpreted in a more negative way than intended, and add to an already stressful situation.

For example:

Situation Patient avoiding appointments

Patient's thoughts "I'll be told off"

Less helpful reply "You didn't come to your last appointment, your health doesn't seem to be your priority"

More helpful reply "Is there anything we can do to make it easier for you to attend your appointments?"

3

Closing the conversation

Here are some hints and tips about how to effectively and safely close the conversation.

Agree actions together

Try questions like:

- “What would you like to change by the end of the year?”
- “What’s the most important area of your diabetes to start working on?”

Effectively use the end of appointments

- Ask your patient to summarise.
- Instead of asking patients if they have any questions, switch this to asking “What questions do you have?”
- Always end on a positive note.

You don't need to have all the answers

- It's ok to say you don't know.
- Listening is helpful in itself.
- Take things step by step.

“My GP has specialised in diabetes, but he doesn't care about my emotions. He does all the physical checks...but doesn't ask me how I am – how I'm feeling. Something's missing – I don't get an explanation.”

**Sara, living with
Type 2 diabetes**

What to do if you have concerns

If you identify an issue such as depression, anxiety or eating disorder there are usually three possible next steps:

No current action required

Make a note to follow-up and monitor it in subsequent routine appointment.

Make another appointment

Make an appointment to explore the issue in more detail in the near future to decide if further action is required.

Refer on to a specific service or organisation

Refer to an organisation that will be better suited to support them with their issue such as a specialist clinical health psychologist, the local IAPT service or local charity.

If you are at all concerned about risk of suicide or self-harm then you must contact your local crisis team as soon as possible to discuss it with them. Familiarise yourself with your Trust safeguarding process. If you don't know how to do that, then find out.

Reflection on your practice

What am I doing well?

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What areas can I improve?

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What will I do differently?

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Signposting and resources

Find out what support is available in your area for people with emotional, psychological and mental health needs. This may be from other teams in your local NHS organisation, from social care or from a charity or voluntary organisation. Examples of support available include:

- Talking therapies, for example IAPT.
- Peer support.
- Local Diabetes UK groups.
- Diabetes UK Helpline.
- Diabetes UK forum.
- Therapy, education or support groups, for example those provided by MIND.

Knowing what they can offer your patients and how to refer to them means you can offer people things that will support them in between your appointments.

**This is part of a wider
package of support for
healthcare professionals.
For more detailed
resources, you can go to**

**[www.diabetes.org.uk/
psychological-care](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/psychological-care)**

Used this resource? We'd love to hear what you've done as a result. Get in touch at **sharedpractice@diabetes.org.uk**