

Recognizing and Handling Depression for People with Diabetes

What is depression?

Depression is a medical condition that's more than just feeling sad, stressed, or irritable once in a while. It's especially common in women. Men go through depression too, but may be less likely to seek treatment. People who have certain conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, or diabetes, sometimes also are depressed. The good news is that treatment can help.

What are the symptoms of depression?

Most people with depression will have several of these symptoms for most of the day, almost every day, for at least 2 weeks:

- feeling down and depressed
- losing interest in their usual activities
- feeling that things that used to make them happy no longer do
- weight loss or gain
- trouble sleeping (insomnia) or sleeping too much
- feeling agitated and nervous or feeling sluggish, like they're moving slowly
- having crying spells or being very emotional
- feeling very tired and having no energy
- having trouble focusing or making decisions
- thinking about death or suicide

Symptoms like these are normal after major losses, such as the death of a loved one, diagnosis of a new medical problem, or losing a job, but people should start feeling better after a few weeks. People with depression can't trace their symptoms directly to medicines, medical conditions, or loss of a loved one. Contrary to what many people used to believe, depression is not a sign of personal weakness or failure. Telling someone "Pull yourself out of it!" can't cure depression.



When you have depression, talking with a friend or family member can be a comfort.

What causes depression?

Researchers think depression is caused by a mix of physical, psychological, and genetic factors. Differences in how the brain works, how a person reacts to stressful events like chronic illness or divorce, and a history of depression in the family can all make someone more likely to get depression.

What should I do if I think I have depression?

If you have symptoms of depression, get help as soon as you can. The sooner you get treatment, the sooner you'll feel better. Make an appointment to see your health care provider. Explain how you've been feeling and ask whether you might have serious depression. After asking about your symptoms and doing other checks as needed, your health care provider will discuss treatment options with you, such as starting treatment right away or seeing a specialist.

Diabetes and depression

Depression is common in people with diabetes. In fact, diabetes doubles the risk for depression. People with diabetes are at high risk for depression throughout life. As many as 1 in every 3 people with diabetes has symptoms of depression.

How is diabetes related to depression?

It isn't clear whether diabetes causes depression or exactly how depression is related to diabetes. But we do know that diabetes can make people to feel overwhelmed by the demands of day-to-day care. It's common for people with diabetes to worry about long-term complications, costs of diabetes care, and the effects of diabetes on family and work life. People wonder, "Why did I have to be the one to get diabetes?"

How does depression affect diabetes?

Depression can make it hard for you to focus on taking care of yourself. You might feel that it's too much trouble to check your blood glucose (sugar) or try to choose healthy foods. Things can seem hopeless. When you don't take care of yourself, blood glucose levels can rise. Frequent high blood glucose levels over time raise your risk for diabetes-related complications. Studies have shown that depression can even make aches and pains seem worse.

What is the treatment for depression?

Depression is treated with medicine and counseling (also called psychotherapy). Some people use both treatments; others find that either medicine or counseling alone helps them. Your health care provider can explain both kinds of treatments to help you choose what to do.

There are several types of medicines that treat depression, called antidepressants. Some antidepressants take several weeks to help change the way your brain works and improve your mood. But after a while, medicine can help you feel back to normal and can restore your sense of well-being.

Counseling can teach you the skills you need to cope with the stresses in your life. Sometimes it helps to talk about problems with someone. A counselor can offer a fresh look at what's going on in your life.

Other ways to cope with depression

Many people find that having the support of family and friends can be a comfort. Find someone to talk with about what's going on. Or if it's hard for you to talk about your feelings, spending time with family and friends can help you feel better.

Physical activity can also help you feel better both when you're depressed and once you're feeling better. Take a walk every day, play with the kids, or find another activity you enjoy, like dancing, walking, or swimming. Activity can lift your spirits and provide other health benefits as well.

Remember your risk for depression

Depression can come and go throughout life. Knowing the symptoms and taking action to get help when depression occurs will help you return to "your old self" as soon as possible.

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