

Diabetes Distress

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 Children with Diabetes®

Diabetes Distress

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We often talk about how diabetes can be overwhelming, and there are some different terms that can help identify exactly how diabetes is impacting someone's mental health. Some people experience depression with diabetes, others experience diabetes distress, and some experience full on diabetes burnout. Identifying what type of mental health issue is present is crucial to be able to receive the appropriate treatment.

What is Diabetes Distress?

Diabetes distress is a term that describes the negative emotional burdens associated with living with diabetes.¹ This includes worries or fears that people with diabetes have, such as anxieties about high or low blood sugars. It's very common for people with diabetes to experience diabetes distress, but how does someone know what level of diabetes distress is normal? Or what is too much? The data shows that higher diabetes distress levels make people more likely to have lower levels of self-care, which makes it more likely to have higher HbA1C levels.²

Measuring Diabetes Distress

Researchers have developed a tool called the Diabetes Distress Scale (DDS) to measure diabetes distress, and this is available online for free at diabetesdistress.org. The survey is designed to evaluate how much diabetes distress you are experiencing – low, moderate, or high levels of distress. It also helps pinpoint the causes of your diabetes distress. There is also a survey called the PAID survey, Problem Areas in Diabetes, which you can also find online.²

What helps with Diabetes Distress?

Having a positive relationship and good communication with healthcare providers can reduce diabetes distress.² It sounds so simple, but studies showed that simply feeling like your healthcare team really listens to you and supports you in your diabetes management can lower levels of diabetes-related distress. Of course, this is easier said than done sometimes as there are so few providers who have a good understanding of diabetes. The American Diabetes Association has a diabetes mental health provider registry, which identifies mental healthcare professionals who have been trained on diabetes.

Unfortunately, there are not many studied treatments to help with diabetes distress. It has been shown that the most effective way to reduce distress has been a combination of psychological and educational interventions.² If you only try to address the emotional side, but do not also provide education on how to also reduce the burden of diabetes through diabetes education, it will be less helpful. There are also some practices that use group sessions to help the attendees establish peer support, which can also reduce diabetes distress.

Peer Support

Having friends with diabetes can be incredibly beneficial. From helping people with diabetes feel normal to learning tips

and tricks for making diabetes management easier, there are many ways meeting others who truly understand what you go through can improve quality of life. If you haven't met someone else with diabetes yet, there are many ways to find us! CWD hosts a variety of in person events called, Friends for Life, as well as online meet-ups like the Moms of FFLs (MoFFLs).

You can also ask your doctor's office if they know of local support groups or meetups, say hello to the random people you see on the street with insulin pumps or CGM's, or find people on social media. Whatever way you find them, you won't regret making your own diabetes friends for life.

References:

1. Learn about Diabetes distress

<https://diabetesdistress.org/learn-about-dd>

2. Twenty-five years of diabetes distress research

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dme.14157>

For more information, visit cwd.is/news.