Managing diabetes is as much mental and emotional as it is physical. With so much of the treatment plan on your shoulders—no one else can eat right and exercise for you—attitude and motivation are crucial. The better you cope emotionally, the better you will do at keeping blood sugar (glucose) under control and preventing complications.

Here are some key emotional issues that you may face:

**Depression.** All too often, diabetes and depression create a vicious circle. People with diabetes have a higher-than-normal risk of being depressed, and depression can make their diabetes worse. It saps the motivation needed for good diabetes self-care. It can also lead to poor coping behaviors, such as overeating, that make the diabetes worse.

It’s not known exactly what causes depression in diabetes patients. It might simply be part of the psychological toll of the disease. Diabetes can be very frustrating. It demands constant effort to manage blood levels, and even your best effort may not always succeed. Depression also can be part of the grief response on first learning you have diabetes. It can be triggered later by reminders of the disease, such as medical costs, glucose tests and doctor's visits. Complications can add to the feeling that you're failing in your battle with the disease.

The signs of depression include loss of energy and appetite, disruption of sleep patterns, trouble concentrating, or a loss of interest in things you used to enjoy. Clues like these should lead you to get help. Your doctor or diabetes educator can both give you guidance. If you take an antidepressant drug, be sure you understand its side effects—especially any effect it may have on blood sugar.

**Stress.** When you sense a threat or feel a surge of anger, the body produces hormones that change the level of sugar in the blood. A Swiss study of type 2 diabetes patients showed a spike in glucose among those who had a stressful event after eating.

This is one way in which stress can affect diabetes. When the stress is chronic—when you just can’t stop worrying—it can raise levels of cortisol and growth hormone. Both make control of blood sugar more difficult. Chronic stress, like depression, also raises the risk that you’ll cope with it by doing things, such as drinking too much alcohol, that make your overall health worse. Or it can get in the way of your self-care. When you’re tense and anxious, you’re more likely to neglect important things, like checking your glucose or making meal plans.

Stress can come from your experience of diabetes, especially if you are fearful about the future or frustrated when the disease is hard to manage. Or it can come from something else, such as your...
job or problems with family or friends. Getting at the source of the stress is one way to relieve it. If you don’t like your job and can’t stand the traffic on your daily commute, maybe it’s time for a change. Or if the stress producer can’t be changed—as is true of diabetes—you need to find ways to work off the tension.

The good news here is that one of the best stress reducers—exercise—is also a good way to manage diabetes. In fact, it should already be in your treatment plan. Seeking help from others through support groups is another stress reducer with dividends. Not only can others help you work through your worries, but they also can encourage you to stay on track in your self-care.

**Anger.** Getting mad is not always bad. Sometimes it can push you to do the right thing. Diabetes educator Alison Massey says patients are often angry at themselves for not making the lifestyle changes they know they need. “They know they are overweight. They know they are sedentary,” she says. But she says some use this anger as a motivator to change. Channeled in this way, anger can spur you to fight back against diabetes with real focus and commitment.

Anger becomes a problem when it turns inward, leads to no constructive action and makes you miserable. It also can get in the way of managing your diabetes.

In what the American Diabetes Association calls an “anger circle,” rage against diabetes combines with denial. You are angry at diabetes for forcing you to change your life, but instead of fighting back the right way, you fight back by denying the need to change. The anger circle becomes a vicious circle: The more you cling to angry denial, the worse you feel and the angrier you get.

You may look to counseling or support groups to break this pattern. A self-help method suggested by the American Diabetes Association (ADA), from Dr. Weisinger’s Anger Work Out Book by psychologist Hendrie Weisinger, is to take notes. Keep track of what makes you angry, when you were angry and what or who you were mad at. After several weeks, look over your notes and see how you might change the thoughts and behavior that trigger your anger. Then learn to channel your anger constructively if you can.

With these and other emotional hurdles, it’s easier to cope when you don’t try to do so alone. Don’t be shy about letting friends and co-workers know you have diabetes. You will lose some privacy but be repaid in understanding and encouragement. And you can find plenty of support, through organizations such as the ADA and local groups, from others who are fighting to live well with diabetes.

**Resources**

For more from the American Diabetes Association on emotional health issues in diabetes, go to these Web pages:

