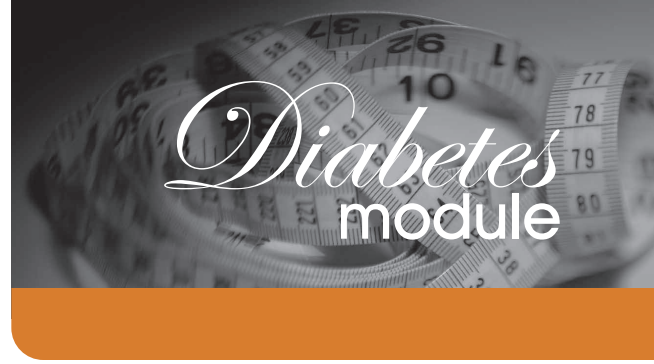


DIABETES: A DOUBLE- EDGED SWORD



“It’s the worst thing that’s ever happened to me!” “It’s a gift, a new life.” “No big deal.” “I consider it a death sentence.”

These are all statements made by people who have diabetes. Your reaction may be the same as one of these or something entirely different. But chances are that you do have some strong feelings about the fact that you have diabetes.

This module focuses on some of the emotional social concerns related to diabetes. You’ll have a chance to examine your own feelings about diabetes and how they may be affecting how you cope with it. We’ll also look at how you can use diabetes as a positive motivator to change your health habits and, as a result, maintain the weight you lose in the Numetra program. And we’ll focus on the importance of stress management and how it relates to blood glucose control.

Accepting Your Feelings

When people are first diagnosed with diabetes, they often experience a state of disbelief or denial. This state of mind can be positive if it allows a person extra time to adjust to the idea of having diabetes. However, if the person uses denial too long, it can delay the start of important treatment. This is because that minority of people with diabetes who deny that food intake affects blood glucose levels may continue to believe that any food is OK to eat and not follow through with the diet modifications that are important to diabetes treatment. This state of denial is often followed by other feelings such as anger, sadness, fear, guilt, and, ideally, acceptance.

Even without denial, a person may experience these feelings at one time or another: They often are part of a normal adjustment process. It’s important for you to be aware of your feelings and to find healthful outlets, rather than trying to keep feelings inside, perhaps by overeating or eating the wrong things. When you’re going through changes in your life, you need to take time to identify what you’re feeling. If you’re not used to doing this, it can be difficult. One suggestion is to talk with someone else who has diabetes and seems to be doing well, perhaps someone in a diabetes support group. Or seek out someone who knows and cares about you—a friend or family member. You also may want to consult with a counselor for assistance. By discussing your experience, you may find others who can help you define what you’re feeling.

Once you have identified a feeling, it is important to own it—that means accepting it as yours and trusting that it is okay. Some people, consciously or unconsciously, establish rules that it’s not okay to have certain feelings; so when they experience a forbidden feeling—like anger—they turn to food or other “pain relievers” to camouflage or deny it. If this describes you, it is important for you to understand that whatever feeling you have is okay. Others acknowledge a forbidden feeling but turn to eating to handle or cope with it. If this scenario describes you, then one of your goals should be to find another way to cope.

Take a minute to explore the feelings you’ve experienced and identify how you usually react to those feelings and log them in the activity on the following page.

Activity: Reactions and Consequences

Explore the feelings you've experienced and identify how you usually react to those feelings. Write down how you typically react to having the following feelings. Then note what happens as a result of your reaction

Feeling	Reaction	Consequence
Acceptance	Seek information about managing diabetes	Make lifestyle changes necessary to control blood glucose levels
Anger		
Sadness		
Fear		
Bargaining		
Guilt		
Disbelief		

Health Beliefs: How They Affect what You do About Your Health

Your *feelings* about diabetes—perhaps disbelief, anger, or sadness—probably stem in part from your *beliefs* about the nature of the disease and how it affects you. Experts think that such beliefs about a disease are important factors affecting a person's motivation to seek and follow through with treatment. Some of these experts say that all these beliefs make up a system of four components they call a person's Health Belief Model (HBM). These four components include a person's beliefs about 1) the nature and seriousness of the disease, 2) how the disease is affecting him or her, 3) what action, if any, can be taken to deal with the disease, and 4) whether the benefits of that action will outweigh the cost.

With respect to diabetes, for instance, your HBM may have components like these:

- Diabetes is a serious disease.
- Uncontrolled diabetes can have or is having a serious effect on you.
- You can do something to prevent diabetes from hurting you.
- The benefits of diabetes self care behaviors (blood testing, exercising, following a meal plan) outweigh the costs.

According to this HBM, you'll feel motivated to do something about diabetes to the extent that you think these beliefs are true. If you do believe them, they help you achieve a "good" balance of feelings. Such a balance involves the right amount of concern blended with the right amount of confidence. Too much concern and you're overwhelmed. Too little concern and you just don't care enough to do the things you should. A good word to describe the right balance of feelings is "respect."

You also need to believe in yourself, to believe that what you do will make a difference in the outcome of your disease. With too much confidence, you might feel invulnerable. If you have too little confidence, you'll think, "Why even try?" Let's call this right amount of confidence "self assurance." Finally, you need to decide: Is the effort—cost, time, energy, giving up things you like—worth the payoff—blood glucose control, lack of or fewer complications and symptoms, longer life?

Diabetes as a Motivational Tool

Think back to the time you filled out your application to participate in the Numetra System. Under the "reasons you want to be in this program" that you listed, health concerns may have been at the top. Diabetes can be a driving force behind your healthful behavior change, and you might even consider it to have had a positive impact on your life. The lifestyle behaviors recommended for the management of diabetes are nearly identical to those recommended to maintain weight loss: exercise, proper diet, stress management, and a good support system. Having diabetes simply means you have a special reason to take good care of yourself.

At different points in the Numetra System, you'll need to remind yourself of this source of motivation. During the Reducing Phase, you'll probably experience some feelings of "magic" because you were able to lose weight so easily and quickly. And that magic can extend to your diabetes because your blood glucose level probably will begin to come into the normal range. The need for medication to control your blood glucose will lessen; you may even go off medication entirely. Results of blood tests such as A1C (hemoglobin A1C) probably will improve dramatically over the next couple of months. Your energy level probably will increase, and physically you'll feel better than you have for some time.

The disappearance of these symptoms associated with diabetes may be motivating for you. The words of your doctor have been fulfilled: "Lose some weight and your symptoms of diabetes may go away." You are controlling your diabetes, and as long as you maintain your healthful lifestyle, it's likely to stay in control. This positive result can act as a continual motivator to help you maintain your healthful behaviors.

You need to remember, however, that while your symptoms may have gone away, you still have diabetes. Even though your blood glucose level appears normal, it's still important to monitor it during the Reducing Phase. Why? Because of the impact stress may have on you. We all have many stressors in our lives—for instance, taxes, work, vacations—and they affect all of us differently. And the way they can affect diabetes differs as well. Some studies have shown that blood glucose levels of people with diabetes go up under stress, while other studies have shown no change.

But the only study that truly matters is the study you conduct. Become your own "personal scientist" and find out what happens to your glucose levels. You'll need to test them regularly to analyze what happens when you have a particularly stressful day. You can use this information to manage your stress. And remember, using food to manage your stress can undermine your weight management efforts and aggravate your diabetes. Instead of eating, try a healthful coping strategy like walking.

During the Adapting Phase, you're likely to see fluctuations in your blood glucose for the first time in a long while. Don't become discouraged. This happens because you have diabetes and are adding solid food back to your daily meal plans. Again, you need to monitor your blood glucose as a way to motivate yourself and get feedback on how you're doing. It's important for you to know how your behavior affects your body.

In the Sustaining Phase, your diabetes will continue to be an important motivational tool. It's a good reminder of why you joined the Numetra System. Remember the respect you have for the disease, and your self assurance in managing it will help you stay motivated to cope with both diabetes and weight management. This might be a good time to get involved in a diabetes support group. It can help to keep you motivated when you've completed the Numetra System.

Activity: Reactions and Consequences

To assess your health beliefs and your balance point between respect for the disease and self assurance that you can do what needs to be done, answer the following questions:

1. Do you believe diabetes is serious? Why or why not?

2. Do you believe uncontrolled diabetes is having or may have a serious effect on you? In what way?

3. Do you believe you are capable of doing something to prevent serious problems with diabetes? What can you do?

4. Do you believe the benefits of diabetes self care behaviors are worth the costs? Why or why not?

Making it Work

“We have good news and bad news: You have diabetes.” Diabetes is a double-edged sword. It creates fear—and it should. It’s serious. It’s also a gift, of a healthful lifestyle, motivation, and clear guidelines. It’s not just good or bad, it’s what you make of it. Make it work for you.