



Anger

and its emotional buddies



What causes our feelings about diabetes?

When someone is diagnosed with diabetes, a variety of emotions can emerge including sadness, guilt, fear, anger and others. There is no way to predict the emotions that will develop upon diagnosis as there are many factors that determine this, including personality and past experiences.

There are chemical changes in our body that occur as a result of stress, so changes in how we feel are expected. Feelings of frustration, anger, sadness, etc., are a normal reaction after being diagnosed with diabetes. For example, if your father had diabetes and he had to take insulin, you might fear having to take insulin injections (if you believed injections would be painful). Maybe you had been warned by your doctor that if you didn't lose weight you were at risk for developing type 2 diabetes. In this case, you might feel guilty or angry for not taking action sooner. Generally, our feelings have a relationship with our thoughts and beliefs.

Why do feelings have such a big impact on diabetes management?

Feelings can make the education and treatment process with diabetes more challenging. Feelings take a lot of our energy and ability to focus. You might have noticed that at difficult times in your life, you have had trouble concentrating. You would find yourself at work thinking about something that was bothering you instead of paying attention to your work. You might find yourself talking about those problems in your life, whenever you had someone to listen. Coping with our emotions can be very draining and makes it difficult to handle other stress in our lives.

How can diabetes care and education specialists help with feelings?

Diabetes care and education specialists have learned when people have strong feelings it becomes important to process them, so the person with diabetes can begin to accept their feelings. They can then better understand the facts about diabetes self-management and hopefully shift their perceptions to a healthier way of coping with diabetes. For example, if you express your fears to a diabetes care and education specialist, they can reassure you that not everyone with diabetes has to take injections or they can walk you through an easier way of injecting to minimize discomfort. They are active listeners. People with diabetes often deal with a lot of frustrations that can be challenging to talk about, especially with friends and family, but they are there to provide reassurance, support and guidance.

Is it bad to have these feelings?

We often have shame about how we feel or guilt that we are not reacting in the “right” way. The truth is, there is no right or wrong feeling in reaction to diabetes.

Feelings can give us motivation to do things, or help us connect with others. It is important to have the right resources in dealing with these feelings and behaviors so that they are not expressed in unhealthy ways.

Dealing with feelings has a few requirements.

- **KNOW** - acknowledge what you are feeling.
- **NAME** - put a label on it.
- **EXPRESS** - release the emotions in a healthy way.
- **ACCEPT** - understand that you cannot change everything about the world, only your role in it.

When we are interested in dealing with our feelings there are a number of resources that can help.

- Family can help sometimes, but other times not.
- Friends often prove to be extremely beneficial.
- Your diabetes care and education specialist is a good resource and will lend an ear.
- If you feel stuck and have difficulty getting help, a mental health provider can be useful.
- A diabetes support group can be a great place to feel supported or try reaching out to peer support communities online.

For more information on healthy coping and diabetes visit DiabetesEducator.org/mhealth

