

Diabetes Distress and Burnout

WHAT IS DIABETES DISTRESS?

Diabetes distress refers to the emotional impact of living with and managing diabetes.

You may feel overwhelmed by the daily demands, worried that you are not managing it well, or concerned about the risk of long-term complications.

It is also common to feel frustrated by how unpredictable diabetes can be, or guilty when management does not go as planned.

Diabetes distress becomes more significant when these feelings begin to interfere with everyday life, such as work, school, relationships, or your ability to manage your diabetes effectively.

If left unaddressed, diabetes distress can worsen over time and may lead to burnout.



WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout is when a person feels emotionally exhausted and overwhelmed by the demands of living with diabetes.

For example, regularly checking blood glucose levels and not seeing the results you hoped for can feel discouraging and relentless, as if it is one setback after another.

Unlike occasional test results, these challenges can arise daily, which can take time to adjust to and accept.

When diabetes distress becomes more intense, some people may cope by withdrawing from their diabetes care or avoiding management tasks altogether.

What can you do?

The next page has some tips and strategies that you may find helpful.

If you're experiencing diabetes distress or burnout, it is a good idea to let your general practitioner or diabetes educator know. If needed, they can help you with a psychology referral.



Strategies for tackling diabetes distress

THINK DIFFERENTLY

Sometimes, people feel like they are 'failing' with their diabetes. Remember, your blood glucose level is just a number, not a reflection of who you are.

- Focus on things you can achieve rather than expecting perfection.
- Change your self talk. For example, instead of 'good' or 'bad', try phrases like 'high' or 'low' blood glucose levels to focus on the facts, not judgement.

GET CONNECTED

Talk things through with your family or friends and let them know how they can support you.

It also helps to connect with others who understand what it is like to live with diabetes. It can be reassuring to know that other people face similar challenges, and share ideas about how to cope positively.



RE-ASSESS YOUR GOALS

Try setting one or two smaller, more specific goals rather than big, complex goals. Getting some 'quick wins' can increase your confidence and help you stay on track.

STOP THE BLAME

It's common to have self-critical thoughts like "I should be doing better" when managing diabetes. This can increase distress and make self-care harder.

Try to pause and ask yourself: "What would I say to a friend in this situation?" You may find your response is more understanding and realistic.

Then, try to apply that same perspective to yourself. For example: "Managing diabetes is challenging; one result doesn't define me." This is called cognitive reframing, and it helps create more balanced thinking.



TALK WITH A PROFESSIONAL

Sometimes you need to talk to a professional. Don't hesitate to reach out to your general practitioner or diabetes educator if you need help.

The DAWN program is also available as a free online resource designed to help you live well with diabetes.

dawnprogram.org.au

