The Diabetes--Depression Connection

If you or someone you care about has diabetes, it is important to know that people living with this condition are at increased risk for depression. The reasons for this are still not fully understood, but researchers believe that the daily stress of managing diabetes may be a factor. Once depression takes hold, it can get in the way of diligent diabetes self-care. If you are depressed and have little energy, you may miss regular blood sugar testing or stop eating well. This can lead to a more depressed mood, a lower energy level, and more problems with self-care. That's why it is important to monitor mood as well as blood sugar so you can identify and treat these problems as early as possible.

The symptoms of depression often develop gradually over time so they can be easy to miss. Depression is more than feeling sad or down for short periods of time. Depression involves a number of indicators that last throughout most of the day and interfere with a person's ability to function at work or at home for at least a few weeks. Depression symptoms include:

- Depressed mood
- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Significant weight change (without trying)
- Trouble with sleep (either too much or too little)
- Agitation, fatigue and lack of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Trouble concentrating or thinking clearly

Depression is a treatable illness. Treatment begins with a depression assessment by a trained healthcare professional such as your physician, a psychiatrist, or a mental health professional. Poor diabetes control can look like depression, so it is important to speak to the doctor who manages your diabetes to rule out a physical cause for your symptoms. Treatment for depression often involves a combination of several interventions:

- Self-care strategies such as changes in diet or exercise
- Counseling to resolve life issues and build new coping skills
- Stress management techniques
- Medication may be recommended, especially for depression that is severe or does not respond fully to other interventions.

Effective management of diabetes and depression requires strong self-care skills. Consider joining a Diabetes Support Group or Diabetes Education Program to get a jumpstart in learning to manage these illnesses well. Once you have a plan in place and have the support you need, you will be on your way to feeling better.

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