

# Defeating Depression

Feeling down once in a while is normal. But what if your sad feelings are more than just the blues? Feeling this way for two weeks or more may be a sign of clinical depression. We look at how to combat depression head-on.

Depression can affect your mood, thoughts, behaviour and body, and can lead to problems at work, home or school. Depression affects the way you communicate with others, and the way you think and feel about life in general.

## Depression and diabetes

Research indicates that people with diabetes (Type 1 or Type 2) are twice as likely to experience depression as those without diabetes.

- Approximately 15–20% of adults with diabetes suffer from depression
- Women with diabetes suffer more from depression than men with diabetes
- The chances of becoming depressed increase as diabetes complications worsen
- A person with depression is less likely to follow medication or healthy eating plans.

The reasons for the increased risk of depression for people with diabetes are not yet fully understood. Possible explanations include the daily demands


of diabetes self-care, the stress of dealing with diabetes complications, and perhaps the physical effects associated with the disease, such as chemical and blood-flow changes in the brain.

Depression can have major implications for you including:

- Increased blood glucose levels, and therefore a higher risk of long-term complications
- Reduced social activity and quality of life
- Decreased physical activity and increased likelihood of obesity
- Greater likelihood of smoking or alcohol abuse.

## What to do

Depression can get you into a vicious cycle as it can block good diabetes self-care. If you are depressed and have no energy, you may find regular blood glucose testing too much. If you feel so anxious that you can't think straight, it will be hard to make healthy food choices.



If you've got both diabetes and depression, treat both — and both will improve.

However, don't accept low times as inevitable or beyond your control.

**Check your symptoms** In the checklist, tick the clinical depression symptoms you are having. It is natural to experience some of these symptoms briefly from time to time. However, if you have been having a number of them for two weeks or more and they are having a detrimental effect on your personal or professional life, you may be experiencing a more serious form of depression.

**Talk with your doctor, nurse, or diabetes team.**

Your doctor may refer you to a specialist such as a psychiatrist or psychologist.

**Medication** Keep taking your diabetes medication. To help your problems, your doctor may adjust your diabetes or other medications, as some may have depressant side effects. These include some blood pressure medications and antihistamines.

**Talk it out** Sharing your feelings is an effective way of relieving the burden. Start off by talking to family and friends. Emphasise that you are not expecting them to solve your problems, but that discussing issues with them will really help you.

**Socialise more** Being with other people can help take your mind off things and make you feel less alone. Community groups such as your local diabetes society, interest groups, volunteer organisations and church may be good places to start.

**Physical activity** Keep on track with your programme. Exercise releases endorphins, the body's chemical compounds that improve mood and fight pain.

**Stay away from alcohol** Drinking will not drown your sorrows. Alcohol is a depressant and will only add to your sad feelings.

### Depression treatment

Depression is treatable. Plus, relief of depression is associated with improved blood glucose control.

In general, there are two types of treatment. One is psychotherapy, or counselling. This can help you look at the problems that bring on depression. It can also help you find ways to relieve the problems. Therapy can be short term or long term.

The other treatment is antidepressant medication. Talk to your doctor or psychiatrist about side effects, including how the medication might affect your blood glucose levels.

Remember to tell any health professional you visit about the medications you take.

Depression requires careful management because of its severe impact on the quality of life. However, effective treatments are available and can lead to improvements in blood glucose control. If you've got both diabetes and depression, treat both — and both will improve. **d**

## CHECKLIST of depression symptoms

Spotting depression is the first step. Getting help is the second. Having five or more of the following symptoms for two weeks or more may indicate you have clinical depression.

- Feeling down** – you feel sad, empty, or irritable a lot of the time
- Loss of pleasure** – you have little or no interest in doing things you usually enjoy, including sex
- Loss of energy** – you feel tired all the time
- Agitation** – you feel so anxious you can't sit still
- Change in appetite** – your normal appetite changes, or you have had a quick weight gain or weight loss
- Guilt** – you feel you 'never do anything right' and worry that you are a burden to others
- Trouble sleeping** – you have difficulty falling asleep, you wake often during the night, or you want to sleep more than usual, including during the day
- Lack of concentration** – you can't watch TV, or read, or make simple decisions
- Suicidal thoughts** – you often feel you want to die or are thinking about ways to hurt yourself.