

Depression and Diabetes: What You Need to Know and How to Help

Depression is a mood disorder that causes feelings of sadness, numbness or loneliness for long periods of time. In this handout, you will learn how depression affects people with diabetes. You will also learn common signs of depression and diabetes burnout and how to help your child.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a common mood disorder that causes feelings of sadness, depressed mood and irritability. It can also cause changes in sleep, appetite and energy. It can also affect concentration and motivation. At its worst, depression can cause thoughts of suicide or wanting to hurt yourself or others.

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

In some cases, there is no clear reason for depression. Other times, depression is caused by one or more of the following:

- Chemical imbalance in the brain
- Family history
- Personality
- Certain medications.

Depression is never anyone's fault.

HOW CAN DEPRESSION AND DIABETES AFFECT SOMEONE WITH BOTH CONDITIONS?

People with diabetes have a higher risk of depression. Depression can also make it challenging to manage diabetes. People need to feel in control of their bodies and environment. People with diabetes sometimes feel a lack of control over their bodies. When people feel a lack of control, it can lead to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND DIABETES BURNOUT?

Diabetes burnout is when a person grows tired of managing their diabetes. As a result, they do not manage their diabetes properly.

Signs of diabetes burnout include:

- Frustration around managing diabetes
- Feeling like diabetes is limiting or preventing you from doing things
- Loss of motivation to take care of yourself, but otherwise feeling well

Everyone who has diabetes will experience diabetes burnout at some point. Symptoms of diabetes burnout and depression can look similar.

With diabetes burnout, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness happen around the condition. With depression, these feelings affect many areas of a person's life. They also last for long periods of time.

Tips on how to support your child on the back >>

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD?

There are many ways you can support your child:

- **Learn the signs of depression and diabetes burnout.** Contact your child's care team if you notice any signs or if you have questions about what your child is experiencing.
- **Do not let perfect be the enemy of good.** Sometimes, people with diabetes feel like they need to manage their condition perfectly. This can lead to diabetes burnout. Ask the care team for ideas on ways to take healthy breaks from managing diabetes.
- **Help your child set small, achievable goals to improve their mood.** This can include things like going for a walk, spending time with loved ones or doing something they enjoy.
- **Get moving.** Physical activity can help improve your child's physical and mental health. This include improving feelings of depression and keeping a healthy weight.
- **Consider therapy or medication.** If your child has depression, it is important to get help. Talk with your child's pediatrician or diabetes care team about referrals and recommendations.
- **Connect with people who understand.** There are many resources at MassGeneral Hospital for Children and online. Some organizations that can help include:
 - **Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at MGHfC**
www.massgeneralforchildren.org/psychiatry
 - **The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds**
www.mghclaycenter.org
 - **Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes Center at MGHfC**
www.massgeneralforchildren.org/endocrine
 - **American Diabetes Association**
www.diabetes.org
 - **Joslin Diabetes Research Foundation**
www.joslin.org
 - **College Diabetes Network**
www.collegediabetesnetwork.org
 - **National Alliance on Mental Illness**
www.nami.org
 - **Families for Depression Awareness**
www.familyaware.org

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