

Living with diabetes requires lots of thinking and doing, in terms of blood glucose monitoring, insulin injections, carbohydrate counting, thinking about the effects of activity or alcohol and so on. It requires you to juggle diabetes management along with the wide variety of other demands of day-to-day life. People living with diabetes say that these challenges can cause them at times to feel a whole array of different emotions dependent upon the situation. These might include feeling overwhelmed with what needs to be learned or done to live well with diabetes, feeling frustrated or angry at diabetes and what it asks of you, feeling alone with your diabetes and the others don't really understand what it's like to live with diabetes day-to-day, feeling angry at yourself or maybe guilt about your diabetes numbers, which could lead to discouragement, especially if you've been putting in a lot of effort, or possibly feeling sadness or grief, comparing life now to before diabetes came along or linked to thinking about what life might've been like if diabetes hadn't arrived at all.

These are just a few of the possible emotions linked to living day-to-day with diabetes, and they're commonly termed diabetes distress. These feelings can last anything from seconds through to minutes, hours, or even days or weeks at a time. It's important to give yourself time to consider the impact of diabetes on your thoughts and feelings and how these might impact upon your actions in relation to your day-to-day diabetes self-management. What do we mean by that? Well, it's not always what someone knows or doesn't know that impacts upon what diabetes management looks like. It can also be the impact of how the person thinks and feels about it as well. It's not uncommon for people to find that diabetes distress impacts upon their diabetes self-management. For example, feeling angry at diabetes and guilty about blood glucose numbers might lead someone to avoid diabetes related tasks like regular blood glucose checks because of the uncomfortable emotions seeing these numbers might cause, and the other tasks it might then mean they need to do, for example, calculating an insulin dose or giving an injection.

On the other hand, feeling worried about how blood glucose levels might affect long-term health might cause someone to do lots of in-depth diabetes self-management, like checking their blood glucose lots of times in a day, but to the exclusion of other things that are important in life. Both of these patterns, avoidance or overdoing it, have the potential to cause other difficulties and keep diabetes distress going. If you recognize either of these patterns, don't be alarmed. Diabetes distress isn't another diagnosis. It is a natural and common response to the demands of living with a long-term health condition. The level of diabetes distress people experience can vary according to how they're feeling and what's going on in life. Sometimes people can have more capacity for diabetes, not going quite to plan and troubleshoot easily, whereas at other times it can be more of a challenge.

A buildup of diabetes distress can tip into periods of diabetes burnout, where a person with diabetes might start to avoid self-management tasks for more significant periods of time, which has the potential to impact upon their physical health. Diabetes burnout can happen when you've cared for your diabetes for a really long time, you are at times in your life where other significant things are happening. For example, job changes, relationship difficulties, bereavement, moving house, or maybe having a baby. Or following the results of annual diabetes checkups like an eye screening. For some people, a change in results can cause renewed motivation, whereas for others, it can lead to feelings of fear and hopelessness and be associated with a sense of wanting to give up. Experiencing diabetes distress and burnout is common, and diabetes teams are used to working with people with diabetes to look after their emotional wellbeing as well as their physical care. If you're struggling with any of these sorts of difficulties, do talk to your loved ones or your diabetes team to start thinking about what next steps might be useful to continue to live well with diabetes.