

HEALTHY COPING

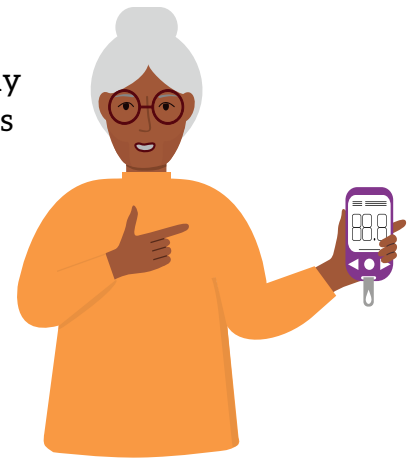


UNDERSTANDING CHRONIC STRESS AND TIPS ON HEALTHY COPING

It is very common for people living with diabetes or at high-risk for diabetes to experience feelings of fatigue, overwhelm, stress, and frustration when it comes to living with and managing diabetes. Having these emotions can lead to diabetes distress and diabetes burnout which could cause one to not want to adjust health behaviors, monitor glucose levels or take medication. Suspending diabetes care has the potential to increase the risk of diabetes-related complications. That is why it is crucial for people with diabetes and prediabetes to understand coping strategies that work for them in various scenarios.

Chronic Stress and Diabetes

Stress is a response your body undergoes when homeostasis is threatened. Homeostasis is known as a state of balance among the body systems to survive and function correctly. When you experience stress your body releases hormones to help get back to the balanced state it wants to be in. These hormones may contribute to insulin resistance and higher glucose levels, making managing diabetes harder than normal. When someone experiences stress consistently for a prolonged period of time this is considered chronic stress. Remaining in a chronically stressed state may make it harder to recognize when times are tough. Let's face it, you don't see red flags when you live in a red world. (Kyrou & Tsigos, 2009)



Diabetes distress vs diabetes burnout

Two known emotional responses to the heaviness of diabetes and the stress that comes with it is diabetes distress and diabetes burnout.

Diabetes distress is defined as emotions that people feel when they are overloaded by the demands of diabetes. Emotions that can be associated with distress are overwhelmed, fatigued, anxious, stressed, worried and angry.

This can look like:

- Feeling alone and isolated
- Feeling angry about diabetes
- Feeling frustrated with diabetes management demand
- Feeling worried or anxious about not taking care of your diabetes, but also not feeling motivated to change your behaviors



Diabetes burnout is a state in which someone with diabetes grows tired of managing their condition, and then ignores it for a period of time. You may be experiencing diabetes burnout if you've ever said or thought of any of the following statements:

"Today was so tiring. I can't take another day like today."

"I'm just going through the motions. It all feels like the same issue, but a different day."

"I'm no good at managing my diabetes anymore. I just can't figure it out. Why even bother?"

Chronic Stress in Ethnic and Racial Minorities

According to the American Psychological Association, racial and ethnic minorities are noted to have an increase in situations that cause a great deal of stress, which can lead to Chronic Stress. Health disparities, discrimination, economical disadvantages, lower-quality of care, inability to navigate the healthcare system, and provider bias all contribute to added stress for an individual living with or at high-risk for diabetes in a racial and ethnic minority community.

Below are a few factors that can contribute to chronic stress in racial and ethnic minority communities.

1. Perceived Discrimination

Discrimination is when an individual receives unfair treatment based off their race, age, sex, and other factors. Unfortunately, people living in America face discrimination almost every day. It is noted that 51% of Asian Millennials, 47% of Black Millennials, 31% of Hispanic Millennials and 26% of White Millennials have reported that discrimination is a very or somewhat significant source of stress. This stress has been tied to higher blood pressure, negative health behaviors and early aging. Along with perceived discrimination, there is also the effect of anticipated discrimination people undergo. This is discrimination that individuals have learned to anticipate in any given situation causing individuals to either change their behaviors

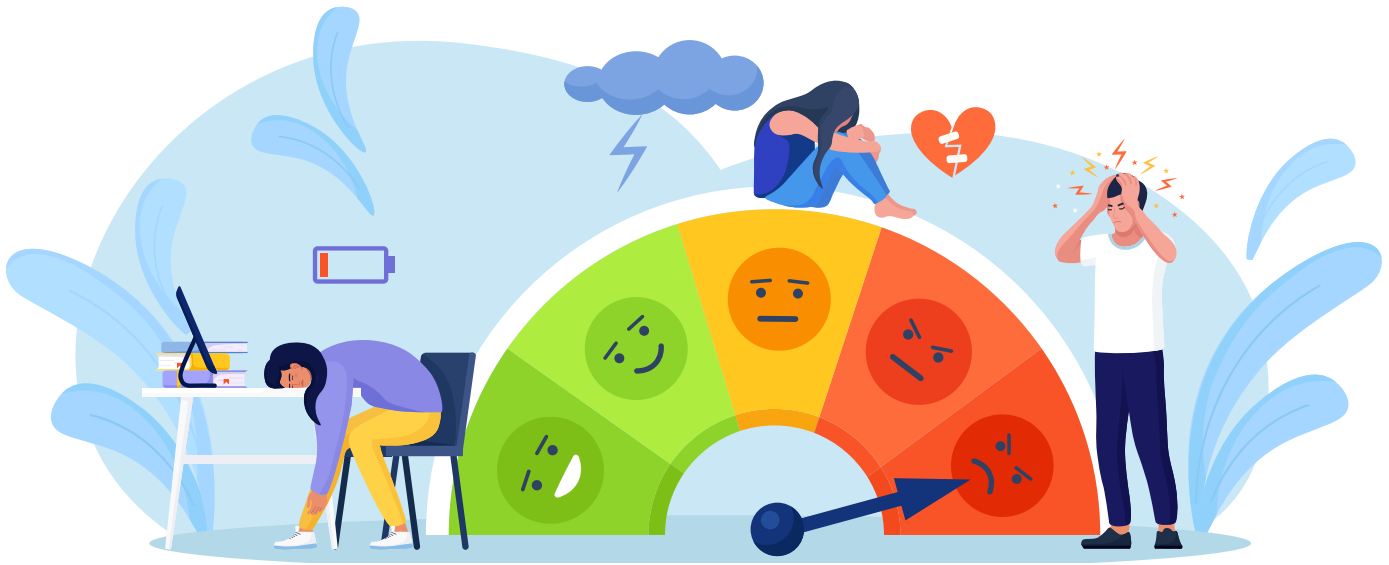
in public, avoid certain facilities, or alter their physical appearance.

2. Environmental Stress and Neighborhood Stressors

The environment and neighborhood a person lives in has been seen to contribute to many health disparities such as childhood asthma, hypertension, diabetes, and depressive symptoms. For people living with diabetes and prediabetes it is important to have a neighborhood that provides a safe space to workout in as well as a grocery store with fresh fruits and vegetables. Without this, diabetes management may be harder to manage.

The good news is, there are ways to help identify situations that may create stress in your life and ways to help navigate those emotions in a healthier way.





Identifying stressors

There are plenty of good or bad scenarios that may cause stress in your life. A stressor can be any internal or external activity that causes a state of strain or tension in one's life. Some potential stressors are:

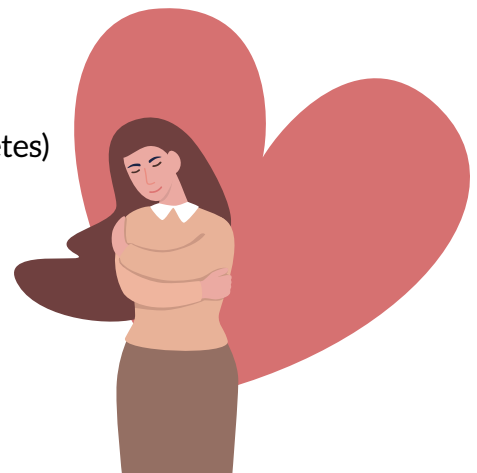
1. Buying a home
2. Vacation or routine change
3. Losing a loved one
4. Financial stress
5. Medication change or issues obtaining medication
6. Starting or stopping a job
7. Discrimination
8. Being sick
9. Menstruation or experiencing hormone imbalances
10. Not getting enough sleep
11. Worrying about long-term complications

Coping with life's stressors

Healthy coping is having a positive relationship with managing issues and hardships that come your way. Healthy coping is not one size fits all and can look like many different things to different people

We asked the [Insulin Inclusive support group](#) what comes to mind when they hear the word "healthy coping" and this is what they had to say:

1. "Recognizing patterns to help feel in control"
2. "Being patient and show yourself grace"
3. "Healthy coping can be influenced by generation and culture"
4. "Talk therapy" (BS acknowledging the day to day tasks of diabetes)
5. "Understanding how one size does not fit all for every person, therefore, coping strategies may not fit every scenario."
6. "Having resilience"
7. "Knowing that it's ok to not be ok, and that it can help to acknowledge that you are not ok."
8. "Knowing what your body needs at that moment and that the "fix" can change depending on the scenario."



Unhealthy Coping vs Healthy Coping

While it is important to know how to manage stress in your life, it is equally important to identify unhealthy coping strategies.



Unhealthy coping can look like...

1. Drinking alcohol and drugs in excess
2. Smoking cigarettes
3. *Too much* of one thing - eating, sleeping, exercise, drinking
4. Hyper focused on diabetes management

While healthy coping skills can look like...

1. Journaling or meditating at the end of your day
2. Engaging in intentional movement that you enjoy
3. Spending time on your hobbies
4. Setting healthy boundaries with friends and family members



Here's how you can start building healthy coping skills:

1. Understand it's ok to "show grace" to yourself

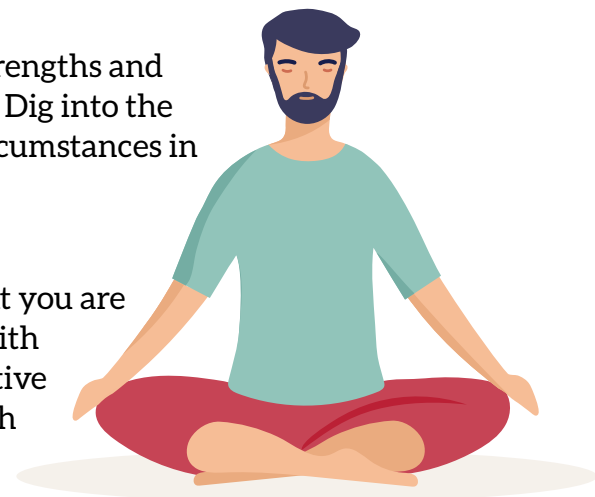
Although this saying is deeply rooted in yoga and faith communities, "showing oneself grace" is kindness and forgiveness to ourselves. Showing yourself grace by giving yourself permission to forgive any mistakes or lapses in judgment when it comes to managing your diabetes.

2. Focus on, and celebrate your strengths

You are more resourceful than you think. Focus on your strengths and previous obstacles and challenges that you have overcome. Dig into the strength from past situations and apply that to stressful circumstances in your life.

3. Seek support from others

Connecting with an individual or a group is a reminder that you are not alone in the face of challenges. Find ways to connect with others. This could be helping them identify a friend or relative you can call if you need help. You can also get involved with an in-person or online support group.



4. Ask for help

For some people asking for help may cause more stress and for others, doing this may help relieve it. Think of people in your life you feel comfortable asking for help whether that be getting help around the house, asking for help with a project at work, or asking a family member or friend to monitor your glucose numbers on your CGM for an hour to allow you take a mental break from diabetes.

5. Understand that diabetes can be unpredictable

Diabetes is not a textbook condition. While monitoring glucose levels, administering medication, moving your body and eating a balanced diet can be helpful with managing diabetes, sometimes things can be unpredictable. Natural pathways like the Dawn Phenomenon, which is when a person experiences an increased need in insulin in the early morning from the stimulation of hormones, and the impact that different hormones can have on glucose levels can lead to a rise in glucose levels. It is important to know in these unpredictable moments that you did not do anything wrong. When these moments happen try to not look at your glucose levels as “good” or “bad” but simply use it as information to know how to move forward with your diabetes management.



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