

Stress

Stress & diabetes

Most people struggle with the diagnosis of diabetes. Adjusting to new routines of eating, medication use and concerns over health can be sources of stress. It is important for all of us to manage stress but particularly for those with diabetes because stress can make it harder to manage diabetes. The first step in managing stress is awareness of stress levels, the way you respond, and the sources of the stress. Some forms of short-term stress are useful as they motivate you to face challenges and to improve performance. However, other forms of stress, especially high levels of long term stress, can affect your ability to cope and your emotional and physical well being.

Stress – What can you do?

Awareness

Be aware of your stress levels. It is important to notice for example when you are tense, worried, irritable or having trouble concentrating. Awareness allows you to take early action to deal with stress.

Problem solving

Is the source of stress related to your living with diabetes? Can your health professional assist you in problem solving and making informed decisions? Problem solving can be a useful first step in dealing with other sources of stress.

Whose problem is it?

Sometimes we take on other people's problems. It is always important to ask, "Whose problem is this?" and to recognise that not all problems are yours to solve.

Acceptance

Not all problems have immediate solutions. For these, practising acceptance can be useful. Ask yourself "Can I do anything about this right now?" If the answer is "Yes" do it; if the answer is "No" accept this and do other things to alleviate your stress.

Thought patterns

If you consistently have thought patterns that make it difficult for you to cope with stress, consider obtaining help to recognise and change these patterns.

Time management

Learn to set priorities for the demands on your time. Make achievable goals and have realistic expectations of the time it takes to achieve these. Remember to recognise and reward yourself as you take steps towards your goals.



Assertiveness

Learn to say “No” when you feel overloaded or simply do not want to do something. You cannot be all things to all people. If you fear the consequences of assertiveness it may be useful to take an assertiveness training course.

Exercise

Regular exercise is recognised as one of the best ways to manage stress. Aim to include exercise such as walking, bike riding or fitness classes in your weekly routine.

Yoga & Meditation

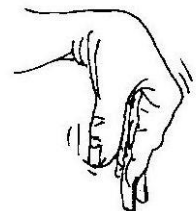
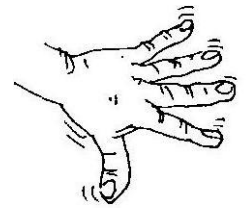
These can be very useful stress management techniques for some people, as can spiritual practices.



Short muscle relaxation exercises

In a sitting position follow some or each of the steps below. Be careful not to over-tense your muscles. Exercise the following muscles, feel the tension and relax.

- > Stretch your fingers right out
- > Make a tight fist with your hand
- > Bend your hand from the wrist
- > Bend your arm from the elbow
- > Straighten and stretch your arm out
- > Stretch both arms and push against an invisible barrier
- > Push your elbows into the back of your chair
- > Push your toes into the floor
- > Bend your feet up
- > Push your knees together tightly
- > Straighten both legs and push against an invisible wall
- > Clench your buttocks together
- > Press your abdomen into the back of the chair
- > Push your spine into the back of the chair
- > Shrug your shoulders right up to your ears and drop them down
- > Press your elbows to your sides and feel your chest muscles
- > Press your chin into your chest
- > Push your tongue against the roof of your mouth
- > Wrinkle your nose
- > Screw up your eyes tightly
- > Tense everything - every muscle you can remember
- > **Relax**



Relaxing with imagery

Visualise a place where you are happy and content - this may be your own sitting room, a beach or a meadow by a river. Close your eyes and establish regular, gentle breathing. Visualise your scene. Using all your senses, slowly go through what you can see, what you can hear, what you can smell and what you can touch. Hold the image. When you want to leave, breathe deeply and slowly and count from one to three, reaching full alertness but maintaining a relaxed state.

Breathing techniques

Focusing on your breathing is one way to manage acute stress. Use it when you get stressed at traffic lights or in a supermarket queue. Breathe in slowly to a count of three, hold your breath for a second and breathe out slowly to a count of three. Aim for about ten breathes a minute. Note that this is not deep breathing but slow breathing.

Remember...

Stress managed well can build your resilience. Aim for a balance between work and health commitments, family, friends, exercise and relaxation. As you manage stress, be willing to accept help from others and recognise and reward your own achievements.

If diabetes is the problem

Perhaps it would help to talk to people who understand what it's like to have the condition. Check out your local Diabetes Centre. If you are having trouble controlling eating habits, plan ahead, have the right food in the fridge. Have healthy snack foods ready for when you feel hungry OR when you don't have time to sit and plan. Don't grab something from the takeaway - and sink under the weight.

Resources

If after trying some of the self-help techniques mentioned above you still feel stressed, contact your GP. They may be able to put you in touch with a local group or with someone who has faced similar problems.

There are people and services who can advise you:

- > **Relaxation and meditation books and tapes** – Talk to your GP, or visit the Cope Centre at 499 Ormond St, Adelaide. Ph: 8245 8100. Cope has an extensive library and bookshop where you can borrow or purchase stress management materials. They also run courses.
- > Check out your local Messenger Newspaper for the WEA Guide which is included quarterly. There are often very affordable **courses** on meditation, relaxation, Tai Chi, Yoga, and exercise.
- > Ring your **local community health centre** to see what resources, groups and courses they may have to offer.
- > Talk to a **social worker**. Ask at your local health service.

For more information

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