

DIABETES BURNOUT: A NATURAL RESPONSE

Diabetes is a life-long diagnosis. It's 24/7, 365 days a year and there's no off-switch. It's not surprising that some people living with diabetes, whether that's [Type 1](#) or [Type 2](#), and their parents or carers may, experience diabetes burnout.

As an example, someone with Type 1 diabetes is likely to do at least four blood tests a day - that's 14,600 blood tests in 10 years. And, following a lot of those, they'll have had to 'take action'. Whether that be giving insulin, adjusting basal rate, or hunting for jelly babies as a way to change their blood sugar levels.

For someone with Type 1 diabetes, there are hundreds of extra decisions that need to be made every day. It can be exhausting - practically, physically and emotionally.

What is diabetes burnout?

Diabetes burnout, also known as diabetes distress, is a natural and rational response to living with a demanding, long-term condition.

It's the term given when people feel frustrated, defeated and/or overwhelmed by diabetes. All feelings are focused around diabetes so outwardly an individual may not seem unhappy. It's not the same as depression - where people feel negative about themselves, others and the future - and it's not a 'disorder'. But it is important to recognise, and get help.

Multi-national studies estimate that at highest levels, diabetes burnout affects 44% of people diagnosed with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. And it's been consistently linked with higher HbA1c levels.

Who is affected?

People who have been managing their diabetes for a long time are more prone to diabetes burnout, but it can happen at any age as a result of the demands of living with a long-term condition. Parents and carers of those with diabetes can also be affected.

It can be triggered by lots of things, including:

1. **The non-stop nature of diabetes.** For some, the burnout may be a natural reaction to having managed their diabetes over a long period of time - without a single day off.
2. **Life events.** Burnout may coincide with a particularly demanding time for example relationship difficulties, family stress or bereavement. When these events happen, diabetes may naturally be seen as a low priority.
3. **Developing complications.** Developing [diabetes-related complications](#) can be the motivation some people need, but others find themselves asking 'What's the point?' and wondering why it's even worth trying.

Are you dealing with diabetes burnout?

Diabetes burnout can include the following symptoms:

- Feeling overwhelmed and defeated by diabetes
- Feeling angry about diabetes and frustrated about the demands of managing it
- Feeling as though diabetes is controlling your life
- Worrying about not taking enough care of your diabetes but unmotivated or unwilling to change
- Avoiding parts of your diabetes routine eg attending appointments, testing
- Not caring about blood sugar levels
- Reverting to unhealthy behaviours eg poor diet
- Feeling alone and isolated with diabetes

Where to get help

If you think you may be experiencing diabetes burnout, it's important to get help.

- **Speak to your healthcare team**

Burnout is common and natural, so even though it can be hard to talk about these feelings or time is limited, do speak to a healthcare professional - that's what they're there for. They should

be able to get you support from a psychologist or appropriately trained member of your healthcare team.

Tips to help avoid diabetes burnout

There are some things you can do yourself to help you overcome or avoid diabetes burnout.

- You're allowed to have negative feelings about your diabetes. Give yourself the permission to feel angry, upset, frustrated when you need to. It's natural and a healthy response to the demands of diabetes.
- Always look after yourself. During stressful phases, diabetes may be less of a priority. Consider what you need to do as a minimum to look after your health.
- Look for balance. Your life shouldn't be defined by your diabetes. Take the time to socialise, enjoy relationships with others and get the rest and relaxation you need.
- Set yourself realistic goals. Being a perfectionist is hard to maintain.
- Do one thing at a time. When it comes to managing your diabetes aim to improve one thing at a time. You'll feel you've achieved something, and reward yourself when you do.
- Speak to your diabetes team. They're there to help and talking therapies – like counselling – can help. Ask your team for a referral.
- Speak to others. Most people with diabetes will understand what you're going through, sharing experiences will help.