

Love Yourself For Good Health

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Leading a healthy lifestyle is not easy. Watching our diet. Being physically active. Getting enough sleep. The list goes on. Cultivating a healthy lifestyle is even harder when we have diabetes. It gets even more overwhelming when we have to take our medications regularly, check our blood sugar periodically, arrange various medical appointments and get there on time, and the like.

Slip ups happen, at least for some, if not for most of us. There will be times when we forget an appointment, miss recording our blood sugars, or literally “slip in” that piece of high-sugar, high-caloric dessert. Inevitably, we feel guilty that we did something “bad”. We get angry with ourselves for not following guidelines. We begin to feel ashamed of ourselves. But guilt, shame and anger are far from healthy behaviours.

Behavioural change is made harder when we have been taught to value ourselves based on what we do. As a child, we get messages from adults and the wider society that we are “good” only when we achieve certain grades. As an adult, we also receive explicit or implicit messages from people around us, that we are worthy only if we work in certain jobs, hold particular positions or earn a certain amount of money. Naturally, when it comes to our health, we also evaluate ourselves based on what we are doing.

Fortunately, developing self-compassion not only enables individuals to manage these emotions and the associated self-criticism, it offers a gentler way of relating to ourselves and enhancing self-management in diabetes. Self-compassion means to extend compassion to one’s self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. In very simple terms, it involves being kinder to ourselves.

Egede and Osborn (2010) in a series of research, found that patients who reported higher levels of self-compassion have a higher motivation to engage in self-management of diabetes, quit smoking, maintain a healthy diet, and exercise.

The good news is that self-compassion can be learnt. When highly self-critical individuals in particular were taught self-compassion, they managed to achieved their health goals despite setbacks. Self-compassion might have helped these individuals tolerate distress when they experience setbacks, enabled them to motivate themselves instead and focus on taking actions to improve their health.

Here are some ways to cultivate self-compassion:

Recognise That You Are Not Alone

Failure can make us feel very alone, especially when you feel like the oddball who cannot make it. Part of self-compassion is recognising that everyone is flawed in some ways. Being imperfect is natural. It helps to remember that you are not alone in your struggles, that there are others who are also struggling to make behavioural changes.

Be Your Own Best Friend

When our best friend or loved ones make mistakes or fail to do something, we often console and soothe them. We do not criticise our best friends to motivate them, do we? But when it comes to ourselves, we have a tendency to beat ourselves up. Instead, talk to yourself and treat yourself as kindly as you would a best friend.

Feast Your Senses

Get a massage, sleep in, eat warm foods, have a warm shower, stare at the window panes when it is raining, look up at the clouds, etc. What are things that typically engage your senses and soothe them? Each of us has our own list, so start writing your inventory.

ME First!

Sometimes, we are so used to doing things for others that we neglect doing things for ourselves. Or, we may find it hard to say “no” to others. Or, we may find ourselves surrounded by people critical of our failure to make behavioural changes. During such moments, think about the in-flight message you hear when on board an passenger airplane, “Put on our own oxygen mask before attending to your children”. You need to look after yourself before you can look after others. Have some “me” time.

Build A Library

Collect phrases on self-compassion that speak to your heart. In times when you notice you are self-critical or feeling ashamed and guilty, take a look at these quotes to help soothe yourself.



Making behavioural changes is a journey we may need to take at one point or another in our lives. Being kind to ourselves does not mean making excuses for ourselves.

Being kind to ourselves means cutting ourselves some slack, giving ourselves permission to move on, from the guilt, shame and anger, to better things.