



## ON THE REBOUND AFTER A SETBACK

Henry Lew, Psychologist

**Diabetes complications. It is hard news to take. Some patients say that the moment they hear the news, they feel as if they are disintegrating. Others have shared that they simply ‘zone’ out, and need some time for the news to sink in.**

It is a setback, especially when you have tried all you can to manage your diabetes. You have changed your diet, attempted to engage in some form of physical activity, followed up on your medical appointments regularly, monitored your glucose level, etc. If you have not been heeding the advice of your healthcare team, you may be kicking yourself for not paying more attention to managing your condition.

Faced with this unpleasant news, you may feel like giving up right now. “What’s the point?”, you think. Or you may start imagining the worst and how the complications will affect or even ruin your life.

Allow me to share 5 “REs” that may help you find your way again on your life journey—Recognise, Receive, Reach Out, Retain and Re-engage. The English prefix “RE” can have two meanings. It could mean “back”, which relates to our experience of a setback such as going backwards, when we suffer diabetes complications. Or it could also mean “again”, which means to restart, rejuvenate, refresh, etc. In presenting to you the 5 “REs”, I hope that you would be able to use these tips to flip the situation over and manage that setbacks you are facing now, just as you can flip a coin to see the “head” and not just the “tail”. It is very much a matter of how you look at the situation, whether you want to go forward or backwards.

1

## REcognise the Situation

Often, we are not aware of what is happening to us when we are too overwhelmed. And it is hard for us to take any action when the feelings and thoughts are too strong and pushing us in a certain direction. Take a step back and acknowledge that the situation is having an impact on you, that it is affecting you. That it makes you feel disappointed and hopeless or other feelings. This helps to free up a space between us, our thoughts and feelings, so that we can manage them better. It is pretty similar to the situation in which our car is going too fast and we need to apply the brakes to slow it down.

2

## REceive the moment

Unwrap emotions. Listen to needs. Having taken a step back, at a safe distance from our emotions and thoughts, discover what your feelings are trying to tell you about what you need and want. Some of us may feel sad. That is telling us that we feel we will be losing out on certain aspects of our lives due to the complications. For example, having visual complications can lead us to feel sad about our impending limited mobility. And this could be telling us that we hope that our lives would not be so limited; we want to find out more information and do something to ensure that we can still move around as much as we can.

3

## REach out for support

With the overwhelming emotions and the things we need to find out or do to cope, it may be very taxing to handle it all alone. Yet you do not want to be a burden to your family or others. However, support from others is important. Even if there are people who cannot help you in practical ways, there are also people who can provide moral and emotional support.

4

## REtain parts of ourselves

As much as the complications could turn our lives upside down, and change our body physically, try your best to retain what constitutes who you are. Continue to do your best and within the limits imposed on you to pursue activities that you enjoy. I had a patient who found much joy in helping her friends throughout her life. Due to diabetes complications, she was wheelchair-bound. In spite of her situation, she did not give up on herself and her purpose in life. She continued to provide a listening ear by chatting with her friends on the phone.

5

## RE-engage in what gives us strength and restart again

Tap into what gives you a source of purpose and meaning in life. It could be religion or spirituality. Even if you are a free-thinker, what are the things that you value in life that keep you going. Often, I hear patients telling me that they want to be a role model of resilience to their children or grandchildren and that gave them strength to deal with the emotional and physical pain.