

IN SICKNESS & IN HEALTH WALKING THE ROAD TOGETHER



Most of the time, we think that the impact of diabetes on our lives is mainly health-related. Sometimes, we are aware of the impact of diabetes on our lifestyle, for example, changes to our diet and monitoring our blood glucose levels. Not all of the time are we mindful of the impact of diabetes on our closest relationships, especially those with our spouse. Even if we are aware of how diabetes is impacting our relationships with our loved ones, we are ever so inclined to be “practical” and focus on managing diabetes better instead.

The way that diabetes impacts one’s relationships is very real, from difficulties in communicating to challenges with intimacy. We need to address the impact of diabetes on our marriage because relationships that individuals with diabetes have with their spouse contribute to how closely they adhere to healthy diets recommended by healthcare professionals and better glucose control¹.

Collaboration

For Caregivers:

Recognise that while the patient needs your support, they do not want you to take over everything.

Ask respectfully what areas they need help with. For example, would they like you to accompany them on visits to the doctor? Do they need you to help them prepare meals?

Gentle reminders are appreciated. With a whole host of appointments and lifestyle changes that need to be made, patients actually appreciate your gentle reminders and suggestions to help them organise. The challenge is when your well-intentioned advice is not taken too well by the patient. The danger then is that you start nagging and criticising which is counterproductive and related to poorer adherence to lifestyle changes¹.

For Patients:

Let your spouse and loved ones know what and how you would like them to help or be involved in your diabetes care. You may not want to be a burden. And you need not be. Most of the time, your spouse and loved ones want to help but don’t know how to help. Diabetes self-care involves many areas and it can be overwhelming and taxing, so having an extra pair of hands would be very helpful.

Communicate that you hear the well-intentioned advice of your spouse or loved ones and appreciate it. Let them know about your difficulties in carrying something out or help them understand why you are not doing it yet. **Let them know also how much progress you have made because of their help.**



Acceptance

For Both Caregivers and Patients:

You may find that your life, your time spent together often revolves around diabetes and the associated lifestyle changes. Yes, managing diabetes is important but it is not everything. Both of you are not just caregiver and patient. The person you love, care and adore is still there. **Relate to one another as the lovely individuals you see each other as, not just the roles you have to play.** Plan a schedule together to do the things both of you enjoy, or simply just be with the person and cultivate the intimacy.

The simple act of supporting each other has the ripple effect of also encouraging better relationships with others such as healthcare professionals, friends, and colleagues. This in turn leads to more support received by the patient and enhanced lifestyle changes¹. Walking together, the road ahead can be much easier.

Reference:

1. Houston-Barrett, R.A. & Wilson, C.M. (2014). Couple's Relationship with Diabetes: Means and Meaning for Management Success. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 40(1), 92-105.

About the author: Henry Lew works as a psychologist and enjoys coming up with creative ways to engage his patients and readers.