



MONITORING DISTRESS

Managing stress constructively

You probably know, and have heard the well-intentioned advice of people around you many times about the importance of managing your blood glucose level. And you probably have tried, and are trying to monitor your glucose level regularly. But, there are just times when you have slipped up and forgotten to monitor your glucose level for a while and you feel lousy about it.

Focusing on managing and monitoring our glucose level is important. While we are goal-focussed on having better health indicators, we may neglect the role played by stress in affecting the management of our glucose levels. And that is because most people see managing stress as less important, and only see it as helping a person to feel good. They are not aware that stress can adversely affect our management of our blood glucose levels.

Managing diabetes itself can be stressful. Recent studies found that individuals taking insulin to manage blood glucose levels had poorer quality of life and emotional well-being because they feel burdened by the self-care regime¹. How will this impact the blood glucose level? After all, it is just stress.

A potential impact of stress is overconsumption of carbohydrates which increases tryptophan/serotonin release that enhances mood. Individuals may turn to eating more carbohydrates than the recommended amount in their diet, to regulate their mood, which affects their glucose levels. Higher consumption of carbohydrates has also been associated with reduced energy expenditure, i.e., physical activities, contributing to weight gain¹.

The stress of managing diabetes can also contribute to negative thoughts such as:

“Starting insulin is an indication of more serious disease to come.”

“Starting insulin means my diabetes management is failing.”

“Poor glucose control means loss of control”.

Such beliefs can lead an individual to experience fear and avoid facing their illness by avoiding regular monitoring of their glucose levels.

Some may also fear hypoglycaemia and allow their blood sugars to run high as a means of avoiding it, contributing to hyperglycaemia instead².

To manage stress and its impact on our health behaviours and glucose levels, it is important to respond to glucose monitoring in a constructive manner. This involves:

- 1 Learning how to interpret glucose readings.
- 2 Learning what follow-up actions can be taken based on the readings. e.g., when to seek medical help, how to adjust diet, etc.
- 3 Evaluating if adjustments to lifestyle have worked. e.g., how did having regular meals help in managing glucose levels?³
- 4 Learn to see that the readings are important but they do not cast the state of your health in stone. Rather look at the glucose readings as information to guide your future actions to manage diabetes³.
- 5 Use other indicators and not just your glucose levels to evaluate your efforts to manage diabetes to have a more comprehensive view. For instance, your weight, blood pressure, mood, etc. It may not be all negative. Your attempt at increasing physical activity may not change your glucose level but it may have led to some weight loss or build up your stamina, reducing your health risks.

References

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3. Tanenbaum, M.L., Leventhal, H., Breland, J.Y., Yu, J., Walker, E.A., & Gonzalez, J.S. (2015) Successful self-management among non-insulin-treated adults with Type 2 diabetes: a self-regulation perspective. *Diabetic Medicine*, 32(11):1504-1512.

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Responding to glucose monitoring in a constructive manner have been found to be associated with greater frequency of glucose monitoring, improvement to diets like reducing “sugary stuff”, smaller portion size when eating².

Two ways that most patients have found useful in developing the habit of glucose monitoring include:

K eep your glucose meter in a specific place that is easily within sight so that it is easy to find and will remind you to monitor your glucose level

P air monitoring of your glucose with another routine activity that you are already doing, e.g., taking medications.

Glucose monitoring can be tedious or difficult to sustain regularly, but with the above tips, it can become second nature to you. Furthermore, once you respond constructively to glucose monitoring and find that the steps you have taken to adjust your lifestyle have a positive impact on your glucose level, you will feel more motivated to continue to monitor your glucose level.

Success helps you to view diabetes as something controllable and decrease your fears of complications. In fact, most patients feedback that they view what they are doing, e.g. glucose monitoring, healthy diet and exercise, as things anyone would do to have a healthier life³.

