

Finding out you have diabetes



ALASKA NATIVE
TRIBAL HEALTH
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When you find out you have diabetes, you may find yourself experiencing a lot of different emotions. Feeling emotional is normal and accepting your diagnosis may take some time. As you learn more about living with diabetes and what it takes to manage it, you will begin to feel more calm and comfortable with your diagnosis.

Some of the most common emotions people feel when they find out they have diabetes are:

Scared: When a person is diagnosed with diabetes they may feel scared. They may have heard stories or know someone with diabetes, who has lost a leg or had another complication.

A person with diabetes today has very different tools available to them to control their diabetes than people had 20 or 30 years ago. Diabetes can be controlled. When diabetes is controlled, the risk of having diabetes-related complications is much, much lower. Having diabetes DOES NOT mean you will lose a leg, go blind, be on kidney dialysis or have some other complication you might have heard of.

Shocked: Many people are shocked when they hear they have diabetes. Often times, people feel that illness is something that won't happen to them. When a person hears they have diabetes, they may feel like they are having a dream, or think, "how can this be happening?".

Shock can make learning new information very difficult and there is a lot to learn with any new diagnosis. It can help to focus your first visits with your provider and educator on learning diabetes "survival skills". Survival skills are the skills and information you need to better understand diabetes. Information such as how to take medication and how to check your blood sugar would be considered two examples of survival skills. It is also often helpful to bring a family member or trusted friend with you to your appointments.

Denial: Diabetes denial means that a person refuses to believe they have diabetes. A person may think the test results are wrong or a provider "doesn't know what they are talking about". While denial is completely normal, it is important not to ignore your diagnosis. If you don't treat your diabetes, you put yourself at risk for serious complications.

Sad: It is normal for many people to feel sad after being diagnosed with diabetes. Life with diabetes means a lot of change. New things will have to be considered in order to live healthy with diabetes. Feeling a loss for your old “normal” life is common. This sadness should start to go away as you learn more about managing diabetes and begin to feel more comfortable with your diagnosis. If your sadness does not go away, talk to your provider about getting some help.

Angry: People often feel angry after being told they have diabetes. They might feel angry with their provider, their diabetes educator, family members or even themselves. They may just feel mad about all the lifestyle changes needed to live healthy with diabetes.

While it is normal to feel some anger, it is important not to get “stuck” in anger. This can make taking care of diabetes difficult. One way to help with anger is to learn more about diabetes and how to manage it. Feeling in control of your diabetes might help you feel less angry. If you feel stuck in anger, talk to your provider and try some of the steps in the Adjusting to Diabetes section of this handout.



Guilt: Some people feel like getting diagnosed with diabetes is their fault. Diabetes is a complicated disease; even now we continue to learn more and more about diabetes and why some people are more likely to get it than others.

Feeling guilt about past choices won't help you live healthfully with diabetes *now*. Ask yourself “what can be done *today* to manage my diabetes?”

Embarrassed: When many people are first diagnosed with diabetes, they want it kept a secret. This is very normal. Some people initially see being diagnosed with diabetes is a sign of weakness, because you somehow weren't doing what you were “supposed” to be doing. The truth is, people get diabetes for lots of reasons. With time, diabetes will become only a small part of the person you are.





Overwhelmed or Anxious: It is perfectly normal for a person to feel overwhelmed or anxious after getting diagnosed with diabetes. A lot of lifestyle changes need to be made, and sometimes people feel like they won't be able to do all the things needed to do to live healthy with diabetes: checking blood sugar, going to doctor's visits, getting blood draws, exercising regularly, making healthy food choices, etc. Over time, these tasks will become habit. Taking care of your diabetes will become easier with time.

Adjusting to diabetes

Trying to work through your feelings about having diabetes will take time. As you get used to your new routine, there is a good chance you will need some new skills, along with the support of others. Here are some steps you can take to help adjust to your life with diabetes:

- Get your family involved. Communicate your needs to your family. Let them know how they can support you. Lifestyle changes needed to live healthy with diabetes help EVERYONE live healthier. Regular exercise, healthy food and drink choices and staying away from tobacco are choices that are good for the whole family.

- Talk to someone you can trust. Opening up about your feelings can help you work through difficult emotions. It might be hard at first, but you can do it! Try to find the words for the emotions you are feeling and share them. Over time, try to share some of the positive feelings you are having too. Eventually you will start to feel more calm and confident in your ability to care for your diabetes.
- Get organized: Make a plan that includes when you will exercise, when you will check your blood sugar, what you will eat for lunch, etc. Do you have the supplies you need? Can you get them? Can you make your provider visits in advance, so they are on your calendar? Being organized and having a plan can help you feel more in charge of your diabetes!
- Find a support group, or make your own: Is there a support group in your area? Even if you live in a village, there may be another person or people who would like to meet up to talk about their diabetes. Other people who have been through what you are going through can help you learn ways to cope with some of your feelings. People can also share tips they have learned for things like going to potlucks, preparing food, or staying active in the winter.
- Talk about your feelings to a counselor or behavioral health aide. If you are having a hard time, it might be helpful to talk to someone in your area who has expertise in helping people work through their emotions.

More Information

For more information or if you have questions, contact:

Diabetes Educator: _____

Phone: _____



Diabetes Program

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