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## What to Do When You Feel Overwhelmed by Diabetes

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Reviewed by [Tama Porter, M.D.](#)

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Living with diabetes can be demanding. You need to pay constant attention to blood sugar levels, diet, and maybe medications or insulin, too. It's common to experience social or financial challenges as well.

All the mental and physical demands can lead to what experts call "diabetes distress."

### What Is Diabetes Distress?

Diabetes distress can involve:

- Overwhelm, fear, or anger about living with diabetes long-term
- Fear or worry about blood sugar levels and events
- Guilt or anxiety about getting off track in your treatment
- Exhaustion from keeping up with the mental and physical demands

Diabetes distress is common and can range in intensity. Intense diabetes distress affects:

- 1 in 5 people with type 1 diabetes
- 1 in 5 people with type 2 diabetes who use insulin
- 1 in 10 people with type 2 diabetes who don't use insulin

If the stress and emotions of diabetes distress get worse, it can lead to burnout. Diabetes burnout is a more severe state of physical or mental exhaustion, according to the American Diabetes Association.

Diabetes burnout can be harmful because it often leads people to neglect their diabetes management.

To prevent burning out, it's important to find ways to cope with diabetes distress.

### 4 Tips for Coping with Diabetes Distress

When living with diabetes is making you feel overwhelmed, scared, anxious, or exhausted, there are ways to handle those feelings and prevent them from getting worse.

#### 1. Practice Self-Compassion

"While it's difficult, really the best thing to do is to be kind to yourself," says [Elliot LeBow](#), a psychotherapist, certified diabetes care education specialist (CDCES), and author of *Parenting Children with Diabetes*.

Practicing self-compassion can include forgiving yourself for minor setbacks in your treatment, doing relaxing activities, and avoiding negative self-talk.

#### 2. Let Go of Being Perfect

Managing diabetes is never perfect. If you expect it to be, you'll become disappointed and discouraged, says [Rebecca Morra](#), a clinical mental health counselor who specializes in working with people with type 1 diabetes.

Instead of focusing on controlling blood sugar levels, be curious about your levels and how your body reacts to food, activity, illness, stress, and other factors. Lebow suggests trying not to look at your levels as good or bad, and instead to see them as data about what happened in the past and guides for what to do next.

Set clear action plans for when your blood sugar levels get out of range.

#### 3. Reach Out

"Ask for and accept help whenever and wherever possible," suggests Morra. Support can come from friends, family, healthcare providers, and other people in your life.

Morra lists a few examples of asking for support:

- Requesting accommodations in school or at work
- Asking someone to help you stock up on snacks or drinks to treat low blood sugar
- Accepting a friend's offer to help with carpooling your children
- Asking a family member to help you manage your blood glucose levels when you're feeling overwhelmed

Connecting with others who have diabetes can also be helpful. Ask your doctor to recommend a local diabetes support group, or talk to others here in our community.

#### 4. Connect with a Mental Health Provider

"Diabetes is emotionally taxing, and psychotherapy alleviates a lot of stress," says LeBow.

Starting therapy can be the right choice, whether you're in distress or just want help handling stress or other emotions.

Consider speaking with a mental health provider who specializes in working with people with diabetes, so they're equipped to help you deal with the specific challenges you're facing. You may be able to find a specialist in the American Diabetes Association's [Mental Health Directory](#).

### When Distress Leads to Diabetes Burnout


When someone is experiencing diabetes burnout, they've begun to feel powerless or detached from their diabetes care.

Signs of diabetes burnout include:


- Skipping insulin or medication doses or not checking blood sugar levels
- Having unhealthy or harmful eating habits
- Engaging in risky behavior
- Not going to healthcare appointments

During periods of diabetes burnout, it may be helpful to try some of the tips above, but it's most important to get help. Reach out to your healthcare provider or a mental health provider experienced in helping people with diabetes overcome burnout.


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 CaptainNovolog

I think I've been in diabetes burnout for about 10 years (had type 1 for 30—diagnosed at age 9). I never carb count. I never bolus. I have completely given up on being able to control any aspect of my life and \*especially\* my diabetes. I just let my CGM and my pump handle everything.



Ironically, my last A1C was the best it's ever been, 7.8. I \*have\* been eating much healthier lately and I've been much more active, but I hate what activity does to my blood sugars and I have a very deep-seated fear of hypoglycemia, despite never in my life having gotten so low that I've passed out or needed glucagon.


After 30 years I've stopped believing there's ever going to be a cure and whenever I stop to think about that I become filled with this intolerable, guilt-inducing, white-hot \*rage\* that no one else around me understands. I feel isolated and misunderstood most of the time. And I feel so crappy every single day that it's completely demoralizing.


I don't have a "healthcare team" because that's not available where I live. What I do have are 5 different specialists who know nothing about illnesses outside of their field and who don't communicate with each other to coordinate my care—not because they don't care, but just because that's not how things work around here.

I live in a red state where my access to affordable healthcare is constantly under threat, so I've got money issues to worry about, too, and I simply don't have the emotional energy to go into how hard it's been for me to find and keep a job that provides reasonable accommodations (in addition to having type 1, I also have lasting, severe impairment to the dominant side of my body because I suffered cerebral edema with DKA at the time of my diagnosis—but I "look fine," which means it's been extremely hard to get anyone to even \*believe\* me when I ask for help).

When I think about this stupid disease and all it's taken from me and all it puts me through, I feel so overwhelmingly angry, hopeless, and heartsick that I don't know what to do. So I just don't think about it. Like I said, I don't carb count. I don't bolus. I don't care. Except I do care. So much that it hurts. I don't know. I'm sorry for bringing so much negativity here (especially for my very first post; what a way to make an entrance, huh?) but I don't really have anyone or anywhere else to talk about this with.

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 LisaE

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Welcome to Dario Connect, [CaptainNovolog](#). We're glad that you're here with us. It sounds like you've been through a lot. I'm sorry to hear that you've been struggling. Please know you are not alone. This is a fantastic group of members and experts who can relate and are here to support you. You are always free to share, vent, ask questions or just

browse the articles. I wish you only better days ahead, sending positive vibes. 🙏

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