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Chapter **1**

How Diabetes Affects Us All

Today, 415 million people worldwide are living with diabetes. By 2040, more than half a billion people are expected to have diabetes. Despite the fact that diabetes rates continue to spike around the world, the topic is often avoided due to stigmas associated with having the condition. In the United States, it's estimated that one in two adults currently have either diabetes or prediabetes. So this book is relevant not only to health care professionals, or those with diabetes and their caregivers, but to everyone.

This chapter discusses the importance of reducing the stigma of diabetes in society. If you've been diagnosed with diabetes, it doesn't affect just you. How you deal with the disease affects your family, friends, and coworkers. This chapter also shows you how to cope with diabetes and how to understand its impact on your important relationships. Best of all, we share easy and effective tips for living your best life.

Finding Hope and Success Amid a Diabetes Diagnosis

With diabetes rates as high as they are, everyone you know will likely be affected by it in some form at some point in their life. Many of us have close personal ties with people with diabetes but aren't involved with their care on a daily basis. Even though the diabetes statistics are startling and the topic conjures up all kinds of horrible images for many, there is hope.

KNOWING YOU'RE NOT ALONE

If you have diabetes, you're not alone. You may not even be aware of some of the world-renowned figures who live with diabetes every day, just like you. Their success on the world stage exemplifies why diabetes doesn't need to prevent you from accomplishing your goals.

Here are just a few celebrities that you may recognize:

- **Halle Berry:** The American model turned actress was diagnosed with diabetes at the age of 22 and, at the time of writing this book, is now 55 years old and enjoying the time of her life, thanks to diet and exercise.
- **Tom Hanks:** This actor has played numerous roles, including *Captain Phillips* and *Saving Mr. Banks*, since he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in 2013. Diabetes hasn't slowed his career at all. In addition to acting, he also produces, directs, and writes screenplays.
- **Patti LaBelle:** This American soul singer and actress has won two Grammy awards during her career — the first for her tenth album, *Burnin'*, and the second for her *Live! One Night Only* album in 1998. She was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in 1995 after she passed out on stage during a performance in New York City. LaBelle's mother died from diabetes-related complications, so LaBelle adopted a healthful lifestyle after her diagnosis.
- **Wendell Pierce:** If you enjoyed *The Wire* on TV, you enjoyed watching this actor, who played Detective Bunk Moreland. He has been in more than 30 movies and has played many roles on TV, including *Treme*. Pierce has tried to help others with his disease by starting a chain of groceries that sell quality food in low-income areas.
- **Sharon Stone:** No one could say that this actress with type 1 diabetes has failed to obtain any roles or to play them with the greatest skill.

People with diabetes also successfully perform in every professional sport. (To read about the role of sports and exercise in your life, see Chapter 10.)

- **Football:** Kyle Love of the Carolina Panthers and Jake Byrne, who played with the San Diego Chargers, are football players who don't let their diabetes slow them down. Love has type 2 diabetes, and Byrne has type 1 diabetes.
- **Baseball:** Sam Fuld plays baseball for the Oakland Athletics, and Brandon Marrow plays baseball with the San Diego Padres.
- **Basketball:** Gary Forbes plays basketball for the Toronto Raptors, and Adam Morrison recently retired from professional basketball after playing for the Los Angeles Lakers and the Charlotte Bobcats.

If you think that diabetes may prevent you from a career in the sciences, just consider these modern-day researchers with diabetes who perform at the highest level in every field:

- **David Cummings, MD:** A professor at the University of Washington, he is exploring the place of metabolic surgery in type 2 diabetes.
- **Martin Gillis, DDS:** He is clarifying the effect of diabetes on the oral cavity.
- **Nicholas Mayall:** He added to science's knowledge of nebulae, supernovae, spiral galaxies, and the age of the universe, and he's in no way limited by his diabetes.



REMEMBER

The very good news is that diabetes, especially type 2 diabetes, can be reversed. The body can heal itself with the proper treatment. A delicious and diabetes-friendly diet, pleasurable physical activity, lifestyle enhancements, and (at times) pharmaceutical drugs can help someone who has just been diagnosed feel better than before. Each person's body, mind, and consciousness works differently, so finding the right formula to keep you and your loved ones healthy may require different levels or types of effort.

Changing attitudes about diabetes



FROM THE
AUTHORS

From Dr. Simon Poole: A patient recounted the following: "The hardest thing about having diabetes is having to deal with doctors who do not respect me." Several times over the years, she had followed her doctor's recommendations exactly, but her glucose control hadn't been satisfactory. The doctor blamed her for this "failure."

Shame, and even blame, are a common experience for patients diagnosed with diabetes. These ideas are made worse by a perception of an ideal body image that

has been promoted by media and advertising. This can create significant barriers to patients looking for help and support. Often when people disengage from treatment, doctors interpret the situation as a lack of self-care or an “irresponsible” disregard for the consequences, but it’s much more likely because of an unspoken and complex fear of judgment. People who feel less able to express themselves in a confident way may be disproportionately affected by the stigma surrounding the disease, which perpetuates health inequalities. Doctors, therapists, friends, and colleagues can help by being aware of these issues and also considering their own sometimes unconscious biases and prejudices.



FROM THE
AUTHORS

From Amy Riolo: If I had a magic wand, I’d remove all the negative connotations associated with people with diabetes as well as the misconceptions and the myths that are obstacles to healing. Over decades of educating both doctors and patients about functional and behavioral strategies to help reduce diabetes rates and transform the health of those afflicted with it, I find that the same stigma exists today as when I started.

Ten years ago, I was a part of a panel discussion with endocrinologists who were trying to address the issue, but little has changed since then, despite our efforts. As a result, I’d like to remind everyone that diabetes is no more a part of a poor diet or lifestyle than any other disease or illness is. Many conditions (heart disease, high blood pressure, cholesterol levels, strokes, and so on) can be helped or avoided with the proper lifestyle and diet. Thankfully, most people don’t judge those who have been victims of heart attacks or strokes. Unfortunately, those with diabetes aren’t given the same consideration, and they face a lot of judgment and shame.

This deep embarrassment that diabetes-sufferers have toward their condition prevents them from speaking about it. When I proposed an idea during the panel discussion to have restaurant menus and food packaging contain diabetes-friendly info, diabetes patients told me that they wouldn’t order those menu items, even if they were available. They said they would be ashamed to discuss their diagnosis with “well-meaning” diners who would start giving them advice on how they should change their life.

So after further consideration, the first step needs to be to create awareness around diabetes and to foster an environment of respect and understanding around the disease so that those who suffer from it are able to comfortably have their dietary needs met. Any physical symptom or ailment that people experience is just the body’s way of communicating, and because we all are afflicted with different ailments at various times in our lives, we should show compassion and dignity both to ourselves and one another.

Considering key quality-of-life factors

If someone who you care for has been diagnosed with diabetes, this book will provide you with the tools necessary to help them live better, while giving you an understanding of what they're going through. Keep in mind that the following key factors play a great role in the life of someone attempting to balance their blood sugar:

- » **Family support:** People with diabetes greatly benefit from their family's help in dealing with their disease. A review of 26 studies that assessed the effect of family-based interventions was published in the *Annals of New York Academy of Sciences* in 2015 and concluded there were improvements in diabetes knowledge, measurements of parameters of self-care, and also the perception of social support among adults with diabetes. Encouraging the involvement and engagement of family and friends in the care of an individual can make a significant positive contribution to their experience of living with and managing their diabetes. Chapter 13 gives more ideas on this topic in detail.
- » **Quality of life over the long term:** How does a person's perception of quality of life change over time? As they age, do most people with diabetes feel that their quality of life increases, decreases, or persists at a steady level? The consensus of several studies is that most people with diabetes experience an increasing quality of life as they get older. People feel better about themselves and their diabetes after dealing with the disease for a decade or more. This report shows the healing property of time.

Embracing the Opportunity for Change

By the time you're diagnosed with diabetes, you probably have already suffered from insulin resistance for years or even decades, so the onset of diabetes isn't instantaneous. Getting the proper treatment and adjusting your lifestyle accordingly isn't a consequential punishment; it's an opportunity to live and eat in ways that may have you looking and feeling better than ever before. Think of your diagnosis as a permission slip to dedicate more time to yourself and the things that you enjoy in life. Fortunately, many tips, therapies, and strategies that you may have never even heard of can help you enjoy the life that you want.

Understanding is empowerment

How you choose to deal with your health care determines whether you heal, learn to manage your diabetes, or advance to long-term complications. A diabetes

diagnosis can be a warning that can help you get back on track with your health. You may already be incorporating some great habits in your lifestyle. Having a diabetes diagnosis doesn't mean that those aren't working; it's simply a sign that some additional modifications may be required.

If you have diabetes, in the course of a year, you live with that diagnosis for about 8,760 hours. During that time, you spend perhaps only one hour with a physician. In Chapter 12, we introduce you to many of the other people who may help you manage or transform your disease diagnosis. Equipped with these resources, you should feel empowered to make positive progress in your health. Your goal may simply be to balance your blood sugar, but on the path to doing that, you may improve many other conditions that have caused pain and discomfort over the years.

Dealing with the common emotions among diabetes patients

The following sections describe the normal stages of reacting to a diagnosis of a major medical condition such as diabetes. While very normal and typical, these emotions are partly due to fear that is fueled by misinformation about diabetes. Remember that a diagnosis isn't permanent, that blood sugar changes all the time, and you absolutely can still achieve optimal health, if that is your goal.

Experiencing denial

A denial mindset is common among people when they first learn that they have diabetes. Many patients look for any evidence that the diagnosis is a mistake. Perhaps they even neglect to take medication, follow their diet, or perform the exercise that is so important to maintaining a healthy body and mind. But ultimately, if you'd like to thrive, you have to acknowledge the diagnosis and begin to gather the information you need to help yourself.



REMEMBER

There's a difference between acknowledging your diagnosis, informing yourself on what to look for and how to treat yourself, and identifying with the illness. Regardless of what you've been diagnosed with, you can make up your mind that the disease won't define you. You may suffer from diabetes, and you can be highly proactive in doing everything needed to be healthy, but you don't need to define yourself only by the diabetes. Acknowledging the diagnosis, choosing the best treatment, and maintaining the best lifestyle and diet while thinking of yourself as on the road to wellness (or already being healthy) will yield much better results than mentally identifying yourself with an illness will.

Keeping a healthy and positive mindset can be challenging when sharing the news with your family, friends, and people close to you. Having diabetes isn't

something to be ashamed of, and you shouldn't hide it from anyone. Know in advance that people may give you unsolicited and sometimes inaccurate advice. Resist the urge to feel offended or defensive if this happens. That type of behavior, while it can be hurtful, may simply be a result of uninformed or misinformed individuals who care about you.



REMEMBER

Keep in mind that you need the help of everyone in your community (see Chapter 19): your coworkers who need to know not to tempt you with treats that you can't eat; your friends who may need to know how to give you glucagon (a treatment for low blood glucose) if you become unconscious from a severe insulin reaction (see Chapter 4); and your family who needs to know how to support and encourage you to keep going.

Everyone should also be equipped with healthy tips and strategies that they can do to help you stay on track. Instead of listening to unsolicited suggestions from someone who has no experience with diabetes (but cares about you and has good intentions), for example, offer them a “to-do list.” Say, “Thank you so much for being concerned about my health. My doctor really encourages me to walk (or name your other favorite activity) more; I would love to do that with you.” Or “Taking naps is really good for my blood sugar levels. Could you do x so that I can take a 15-minute nap daily?”

Feeling anger

When you pass the stage of denial, you may become angry that you're saddled with this “terrible” diagnosis, but you'll quickly find that diabetes isn't so terrible and that you can do something to rid yourself of the disease. Anger only worsens your situation, and being angry about your diagnosis is detrimental in the following ways:

- » If your anger becomes targeted at a person, they are hurt. This is sometimes described as “projection” of your negative emotions.
- » You may feel guilty that your anger is harming you and those close to you.
- » Anger can prevent you from successfully managing your diabetes.
- » All negative emotions can be detrimental to your health in general.

Finding motivation to make changes

From an energetic standpoint, anger is mobilizing. In the short term, a thought or idea that makes you angry gives you energy. It requires more energy to be angry than it does to be, say, depressed, which is why anger always follows an initial trauma response of denial. Use that short burst of energy to motivate yourself to

do the positive actions that can help your health. Instead of being angry and stopping or doing something that derails your diet or lifestyle, for example, say, “Because I hate this diagnosis, I am going to do everything I can to regain my good health.” When the anger comes back up, repeat the process as necessary. Exercise, meditation, laughter, and good company will all help put you in a better mood.



TIP

As long as you’re angry, you’re not in a problem-solving mode. Actually, it’s very difficult to transform an illness if you’re angry about it. Many mental therapists work on helping their patients accept the hidden blessings in their illness as a means of being at peace. This is often the last step in complete healing. If you can come to a peaceful view about your disease, it can more easily leave your body.

You may be wondering, “What is there to be grateful for in a diabetes diagnosis?” That question is very common and logical, and the answer is different for everyone. In general, illnesses

- » Give you the opportunity to focus inward (something that modern society makes difficult)
- » Give you an excuse to spend more time on yourself (many people feel guilty if they aren’t constantly doing for others)
- » Enable you to ask for help (people are often very independent, but an illness makes it necessary to enlist the assistance of others)

The answers to each of these questions hold hidden gems of knowledge that mentally help the body perform better.

Giving yourself time to adjust

The stage of anger often transitions into a stage when you become increasingly aware of the implications of the diagnosis. Even though you probably realize that you have plenty of life ahead of you, you may feel overwhelmed by the talk of complications, blood tests, and pills or insulin. When you realize that bargaining doesn’t work, you may even experience depression, which makes good diabetic care all the more difficult.



WARNING

Studies have shown that people with diabetes suffer from depression at a rate that is two to four times higher than the rate for the general population. People with diabetes also experience anxiety at a rate three to five times higher than people without diabetes. The mind and the body are connected, so making sure that your thoughts and emotions are positive will help your body metabolize insulin better along with many aspects of your physical health. Having a professional therapist can be an excellent resource to help you feel your best. See Chapter 12 for types of therapies that may work for you.

How do you fend off depression? Following are a few important methods:

- » Try to achieve excellent blood glucose control (see Part 3).
- » Begin a regular exercise program (Chapter 10).
- » Tell a friend or relative how you're feeling — get it off your chest (Chapter 19).
- » Recognize that every abnormal blip in your blood glucose isn't your fault (Chapter 7).
- » Look for reasons to feel good. When you wake up in the morning, make it your dominant goal to feel your best.
- » Watch your mental diet. What you think about or watch or listen to is every bit as important as the food that you fuel your body with. Choose upbeat, happy, positive thoughts, programming, and music as much as possible.
- » Practice deep breathing, yoga, prayer, or meditation to improve your mood, sleep, and blood sugar levels.

Taking back control

You may experience the various stages of reacting to your diabetes in a different order than we describe in the previous sections. Some stages may be more prominent for you, and others may be hardly noticeable.



REMEMBER

Don't think that any feelings of anger, denial, and depression are wrong. They're natural coping mechanisms that serve a psychological purpose for a brief time. Allow yourself to have these feelings — and then drop them. Choose other thoughts that feel better to you — including the way in which you choose to think about your current health situation — and think positively as much as possible. Move on and discover how to live normally.



REMEMBER

These phases of coping may not occur in the order given, may not occur at all, and/or may last a long time. If one phase inhibits your ability to cope with your diabetes for more than a few months, you may need outside help. Chapter 13 discusses putting together a team of professionals to help you feel your best. You may need outside help from a professional who has expertise in the impact of a physical illness on mental health, such as a mind-body therapist or another mental health professional of your choice.

Keep doing the things we suggest in Chapter 4, and you'll be very gratified at the end.

Maintaining a High Quality of Life

You may assume that a chronic disease like diabetes leads to a diminished quality of life, but you don't have to settle (refer to the sidebar "Knowing you're not alone," earlier in this chapter). Many studies have evaluated the quality-of-life question, and the following sections describe not only what these studies found but also our hope that you can take control and ensure that you maintain a high quality of life.

Practicing positivity and enjoying yourself

Here are some key steps you can take to manage the emotional side of diabetes:

- » **Focus on your successes.** Some things may go wrong as you find out how to manage diabetes, but most things will go right. As you concentrate on your successes, you'll realize that you can cope with diabetes and not let it overwhelm you. Make a journal each night of all the good things that happened that day.
- » **Involve the whole family in your diabetes.** A diabetes-friendly lifestyle is a healthy lifestyle for everyone. For instance, the exercise you do is good for the whole family. By doing it together, you strengthen family ties while everyone gets the health benefits. Also, should you need your family to help you, for instance, during a particularly severe case of low blood glucose, their early involvement in learning about diabetes will give them the peace of mind to know they're helping you, not hurting you. (See Chapter 19 for ways to enlist help from people around you.)
- » **Develop a positive attitude.** A positive attitude gives you a can-do mindset and better health, whereas a negative attitude leads to low motivation, which can prevent you from doing all that's necessary to manage your diabetes. The quickest way to a better mood is gratitude. Make a list of what you're grateful for each day and read it when you're upset.
- » **Find a great team, pinpoint problems, and set goals.** Determine the most difficult problems that you have with your diabetes and then consider how you can solve them by yourself or with a great team of supporting players like a primary care physician, a diabetes specialist, a diabetes educator, a dietitian, an eye doctor, a foot doctor, and so forth. Set realistic goals to get past your problems. (Chapter 12 tells you everything you need to know about getting help from the supporting players.)

» **Don't expect perfection.** Although you may feel that you're doing everything right, you may experience blood glucose levels that are too high or too low. This uncontrollable situation happens to every person with diabetes, and it's one of the biggest frustrations of the disease. Don't beat yourself up over something you can't control.

Exercising regularly



TIP

In one long-term study, a factor that contributed to a lower quality of life rating was a lack of physical activity, which is something you can alter immediately. Physical activity is a habit that you must maintain on a lifelong basis. (See Chapter 10 for advice on exercise.) The problem is that making a long-term change to a more physically active lifestyle is difficult; most people become more active for a time but eventually fall back into inactive routines.

People who do regular exercise often describe it as addictive. They find it so pleasurable that they look forward to the next session. And the benefits for the person with diabetes are enormous, including improved tone, better balance, weight loss, and less depression and anxiety. What kind of movement gives you joy? Do that!

Creating a pro-health schedule

One of the best ways to create a schedule that supports your well-being is to make sure that you schedule something joyful into your calendar every day. We all have factors that may be difficult to change, such as work or medical appointments, for example. Scheduling in time for physical activity, getting fresh air and enough sleep (including naps, if possible), and time to prepare healthful meals will pay off in your quality of life, mood, blood sugar levels, and overall health.

When many people decide to make healthier lifestyle commitments, they often take on an “all or nothing” attitude, which can be difficult to maintain. When scheduling good-for-you activities, make sure that you're being realistic with your calendar. On the days that you work longer, you may need shorter workouts, time outdoors, or naps. Try to think in intervals of 10 minutes and in getting the most bang for your buck. If you can schedule only 30 minutes a day to work toward a healthier life, you could spend 10 minutes walking outdoors, 10 minutes meditating or napping, and another 10 minutes whipping up something satisfying to eat. In the course of a month, those three little 10-minute interludes will have already begun to make a difference. Use your days off to enjoy more physical exercise, relaxation, and meal prep for the busier days.

Processing emotions

Scores of studies show that lowering stress lowers blood glucose. In one specific study published in *Diabetes Care Magazine* in 2002, patients were divided into two groups, one of which received diabetes education alone and the other received diabetes education plus five sessions of stress management. The latter group showed significant improvement in diabetic control versus the former group.



TIP

Whether stress raises the blood glucose directly by causing the release of stress hormones or raises it indirectly by causing overeating, underexercising, and failure to take medications, managing stress certainly contributes to managing your diabetes. Here are some of the things you can do to help manage stress in your life:

- » **Identify the source of the stress.** Are you adding stress yourself by accepting it as an unchanging part of your life or blaming others or outside events that you can't control?
- » **Examine the way that you cope with stress now.** Do you smoke, drink too much, overeat, spend too much time in front of screens, sleep too much, or overschedule yourself so you have no time?
- » **Replace unhealthy coping mechanisms with healthy ones.** Avoid the stress you've identified or make a change in your life. Adapt to the stress or accept it. You can't avoid your diabetes, but you can make it less stressful by following our recommendations in Part 3.
- » **Take time for fun and relaxation.** Here are some of the things you may do:
 - Have a picnic lunch.
 - Get a massage.
 - Take a long bath.
 - Work in a garden.
 - Play with a pet or go to the zoo.
 - Listen to your favorite music.
 - Go to a comedy show or rent a funny movie.
 - Take a nap.
 - Go for a walk or run.
 - Meditate.
 - Stay in bed with your significant other.
- » **Monitor blood glucose levels.** Keep your blood glucose as normal as possible (see Part 3 for tips).
- » **Pursue continuing education.** Stay aware of the latest developments in diabetes care.
- » **Keep your attitude positive.** Maintain a healthy attitude. Remember that someday you'll laugh about things that bug you now, so why wait?



WHEN YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE COPING

You may not hesitate to seek help for your physical ailments associated with diabetes, but you may be reluctant to seek help when you can't adjust psychologically to diabetes. The problem is that sooner or later, your psychological maladjustment will ruin any control that you have over your diabetes. And, of course, you won't lead a very pleasant life if you're in a depressed or anxious state all the time. The following symptoms are indicators that you're past the point of handling your diabetes on your own and may be suffering from depression:

- You can't sleep or you sleep too much.
- You have no energy when you're awake.
- You can't think clearly.
- You can't find activities that interest or amuse you.
- You feel worthless.
- You have frequent thoughts of suicide.
- You have no appetite.
- You find no humor in anything.

If you recognize several of these symptoms in your daily life, you need to get some help. Your sense of hopelessness may include the feeling that no one else can help you, but that's simply not true. First, go to your primary physician or endocrinologist (diabetes specialist) for advice. They may help you to see the need for some short-term or long-term therapy. Well-trained therapists — especially therapists trained to take care of people with diabetes — can see solutions that you can't see in your current state. You need to find a therapist whom you can trust so that when you're feeling low you can talk to this person and feel assured that they're interested in your welfare.

Your therapist may decide that you'd benefit from medication to treat the anxiety or depression. Currently, many drugs are available that are proven safe and free of side effects. Sometimes a brief period of medication is enough to help you adjust to your diabetes.

You can also find help in a support group. The huge and continually growing number of support groups shows that positive things are happening in these groups. In most support groups, participants share their stories and problems, helping everyone involved cope with their own feelings of isolation, futility, or depression. At the time of writing this book, <https://diabeteseducator.org/> and <https://diabetes.org/> offer resources for virtual and in-person support.

