

## **Depression: More than just a bad mood!**

***Depression is a medical illness*** that causes feelings of sadness and often a loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy. It can get in the way of how well you function at work and home, including taking care of your diabetes. When you aren't able to manage your diabetes well, your risk goes up for diabetes complications like heart disease and nerve damage.

**People with diabetes are 2 to 3 times more likely to have depression than people without diabetes.** Only 25-50% of people with diabetes who have depression get diagnosed and treated. But treatment—therapy, medicine, or both—is usually very effective. And, without treatment, depression often gets worse, not better.

### **Symptoms of depression can be mild to severe and include:**

- Feeling sad or empty
- Losing interest in favorite activities
- Overeating or not wanting to eat at all
- Not sleeping or sleeping too much
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling very tired
- Feeling hopeless, irritable, anxious or guilty
- Having aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems
- Having thoughts of suicide or death

**If you think you might have depression, call your doctor or ATC right away for help getting treatment. The earlier depression is treated, the better for you, your quality of life, and your diabetes.**

**ATC Members can have 8 therapy sessions for \$5 co-pay each through Access to Care. Additional sessions are on a sliding fee scale based on income. Contact ATC: 708.531.0680**



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## Access to Care

### Diabetes Newsletter

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### Diabetes and Mental Health: The Mind-Body Connection

COVID-19/Coronavirus is most risky for people with diabetes, heart disease and other chronic conditions and older in age.

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 may include fever, cough, diarrhea, and difficulty breathing.

If you have these symptoms, call your ATC physician.

For COVID-19 information and resources, go to:  
[www.accesstocare.org/resources](http://www.accesstocare.org/resources)

ATC Members:  
Diabetic Test Strips now have no co-pay requirement if you have a prescription from your ATC doctor.

Our goal always is to help our members stay as healthy as possible for a happy and productive life! To help achieve healthy living, this newsletter for members focuses on diabetes education, prevention and management. Let us know what you'd like us to cover in the future.

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[www.accesstocare.org](http://www.accesstocare.org)

## Is mental health pretty low on your list of priorities for managing diabetes?

This may change your mind. Mental health affects so many aspects of daily life—how you think and feel, handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. You can see how having a mental health problem could make it harder to stick to your diabetes care plan.

### The Mind-Body Connection

Thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes can affect how healthy your body is. Untreated mental health issues can make diabetes worse, and problems with diabetes can make mental health issues worse. But fortunately if one gets better, the other tends to get better too.

### Stress and Anxiety

Stress is part of life, from traffic jams to family demands to everyday diabetes care. You can feel stress as an emotion, such as fear or anger, as a physical reaction like sweating or a racing heart, or both.

If you are stressed, you may not take as good care of yourself as usual. Your blood sugar levels can be affected too—stress hormones make blood sugar rise or fall unpredictably, and stress from being sick or injured can make your blood sugar go up. Being stressed for a long time can lead to other health problems or make them worse.

Anxiety—feelings of worry, fear, or being on edge—is how your mind and body react to stress. People with diabetes are 20% more likely than those without diabetes to have anxiety at some point in their life. Managing a long-term condition like diabetes is a major source of anxiety for some.

Studies show that therapy for anxiety usually works better than medicine, but sometimes both together works best. You can also help lower stress and anxiety by:

- Getting active: even a quick walk can be calming, and the effect can last for hours.
- Doing some relaxation exercises, like meditation or yoga.
- Calling or texting a friend who understands you (not someone who is causing you stress!)
- Grabbing some “you” time. Take a break from whatever you’re doing. Go outside, read something fun—whatever helps you recharge.
- Limiting alcohol and caffeine, eating healthy food, and getting enough sleep.

**Anxiety can feel like low blood sugar and vice versa. It may be hard for you to know which it is so if you’re feeling anxious, check your blood sugar and treat it, if it is low.**

### Diabetes Distress

As you probably know, when someone is diagnosed with diabetes many emotions can emerge including sadness, guilt, fear, anger and others. There is no way to predict the emotions as there are many factors, including your personality and your past experiences that determine it.

You may sometimes feel discouraged, worried, frustrated or tired of dealing with daily diabetes care. Those overwhelming feelings, known as *diabetes distress*, may cause you to slip into unhealthy habits, stop checking your blood sugar or skip doctors’ appointments. This can look like depression but it can’t be treated effectively with medicine.

Instead these can help:

- For therapy/counseling contact Access to Care: 708.531.0680. You do NOT need a referral.
- Use suggestions from past and future issues of this newsletter to help manage your diabetes.
- Focus on one or two small diabetes management goals instead of thinking you have to work on everything all at once.
- Ask your doctor if a diabetes support group is available, so you can share your thoughts and feelings with people who have the same concerns (and learn from them too).

**Getting help for a mental health issue can help your diabetes too.** Talk to your doctor. They know diabetes is challenging but may not understand *how* challenging. You may not be used to talking about feeling sad or down. But if you’re concerned about your mental health, let your doctor know right away. You’re not alone—help is available. **Remember: ATC Members can have 8 therapy sessions for \$5 co-pay each through Access to Care. Additional sessions are on a sliding fee scale based on income. NO REFERRAL IS NEEDED. Call us: 708-531-0680**

### Mental/Emotional Health: Social Challenges

Family members and friends play important roles in helping people cope with illness – physical or mental. But, some stigma that still surrounds mental health issues prevents many from seeking help and support, especially from those closest to them. This is unfortunate because these conditions can be treated. (Many mental health issues are medical conditions.)

No matter our background or ethnicity, culture influences our beliefs about mental health and shapes our attitudes. Cultural factors can include:

- Importance of social status. Some may view getting mental health help as a public embarrassment.
- Gender roles. Most cultures discourage men from exhibiting physical or mental weakness, especially those from more male-dominated cultures.
- Attitudes towards medicine. Some cultures prefer to treat any illness with traditional approaches. Others do not consider mental illnesses to be medical issues.
- Age. Older people may be less likely to change their attitudes.
- Religious beliefs and spirituality. Buddhism advocates for spiritual understanding of disease. Non-Christians in Christian-majority countries can hesitate to seek help because they feel there is a lack of understanding about their beliefs.

If any of these apply to you or your family, one thing you can do is to become more knowledgeable about mental health and your options.