

Why emotional support is vital in helping people to live well with diabetes

Diabetes is a complex set of conditions, which is often oversimplified and misunderstood. When treating diabetes, it is easy to focus on the physiological aspects of the condition. However, we know that not only does diabetes affect people's physical health, it can also have a significant impact on mental and emotional wellbeing. Emotional support should be a routine part of diabetes care, and healthcare professionals need to feel confident in broaching the topic of mental health with those in their care.

Diabetes UK's [Future of Diabetes report](#) found that nearly two thirds (64%) of people with diabetes often feel down because of the relentlessness of managing their condition. Diabetes UK's [Too Often Missing report](#) also revealed that seven in 10 people living with diabetes feel overwhelmed by the demands it puts on them, yet three quarters of these do not have access to the specialist support they feel they need. With the challenges of coronavirus adding to the burden of managing diabetes day in, day out, having the right wellbeing support is more important than ever for people living with diabetes.

Diabetes in primary care

Diabetes is a growing health crisis, with [cases of diabetes in the UK doubling](#) over the last 15 years. This means that people with diabetes regularly encounter healthcare professionals who work across all specialisms and disciplines – particularly those working in primary care. It is vital our primary care teams are able to understand people's emotional responses to a diagnosis of diabetes, coming to terms with the condition and the continued day-to-day management of diabetes. All healthcare professionals need to be equipped to provide this support, through improved training and through supporting their own mental health. That's why Diabetes UK has launched a new emotional support module to help non-diabetes-specialist

primary healthcare professionals better meet the psychological needs of people living with diabetes.

The free, online, RCN-accredited continuing professional development (CPD) training module, which has been tested and approved by people living with diabetes, aims to help primary healthcare professionals navigate the emotional challenges people with diabetes face. Mental and physical wellbeing go hand in hand, and so understanding individuals' responses is crucial in supporting them to feel in control of their condition, and key to ensuring everyone has the chance to live well with diabetes.

Diabetes UK's Emotional Wellbeing CPD training

This module offers insight from top professionals, delivers learning through real-life situations with people with diabetes and provides advice into how to make the most of the limited time healthcare professionals have with each individual. The course will help healthcare professionals hone their existing skills, equip them with the tools and resources to discuss emotional wellbeing with patients, and address concerns and signpost to relevant services. The training covers:

- **COVID-19 and emotional wellbeing:** This module covers anxiety around COVID-19, loneliness and isolation from shielding and repeated lockdowns, which have had a huge impact on emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- **How to have a quality conversation:** Here we cover the fundamentals of having a quality conversation, including using the OARS technique – Open questions, Affirmations, Reflective statements and Summarising. We look at how to ensure the clinic is a safe space for people to articulate their feelings without fear of judgement.
- **Common mental health concerns:** Here we focus on how to identify behavioural and cognitive signs of mental health concerns. This includes diabetes-



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specific fears such as fear of hypos or complications, and other serious conditions such as diabulimia.

- **Diabetes-specific distress:** This module covers how to support people experiencing diabetes-specific distress, who feel overwhelmed by the relentless decision-making of the condition, or who are encountering stigma and judgement.
- **Looking after your own emotional wellbeing:** This section aims to help healthcare professionals develop plans for maintaining their own emotional wellbeing.

As restrictions begin to lift and some aspects of life start to return to normal, it has never been more vital to invest time in emotional health. A simple conversation can make all the difference, and we hope this module will help ensure mental health is front and centre for people with diabetes and healthcare professionals alike. ■

For more information, and to access Diabetes UK's Emotional Wellbeing online CPD training course, visit diabetes.org.uk/CPDwellbeing.