The Relationship Between Diabetes, Weight, and Self-Esteem

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Navigating Self-Esteem, Diabetes and Weight

People with diabetes typically feel a great deal of shame, embarrassment, guilt, and sadness about their condition. Society does its fair share to trigger and perpetuate these feelings.

More so than other illnesses, society blames people with type 2 diabetes for causing their own condition. If only you exercised more, you would be healthier. If only you ate better, you wouldn't have diabetes. This is a flawed stance, though, as it is an example of blaming the victim — and there is such a thing as a skinny diabetic.

You know by now that diabetes is not only a disease of physical health. Instead, type 2 diabetes is a chronic medical condition that, like many others, has a profound influence over your mental health as well as your physical health.

It is your task to navigate the choppy waters of diabetes and mental health. Failure to do so effectively will only lead to worsening mental health and physical health symptoms.

The Relationship Between Weight and Self-Esteem

Before you can know how to improve your weight and self-esteem, you need to understand the relationship between the two. Too often, people make the mistake of thinking that weight and self-esteem are directly linked. You may think that losing weight will automatically make you feel better and gaining weight has the opposite effect.

Consider this test to disprove this theory. Do you know any thin people with low self-esteem? Do you know any overweight people with good self-esteem? If either answer is "yes," you must denounce the direct association. A lower number on a scale does not necessarily equal a better self-esteem rating.

There is a relationship between self-esteem and weight, but the correlation is much weaker than you may think. If you lose weight, you will probably feel happy and more hopeful. If you gain weight, you may feel sadder and more negative.

But these changes in feelings are more likely due to a sense of power or powerlessness associated with succeeding or failing at goals. If you accomplish a weight loss goal you will feel empowered and in control of your life. If you cannot reach your goal, you will feel like a failure.

In some respects, you may find it easier to think that weight and self-esteem exist in a cause and effect relationship. Rather than having two issues to deal with, you would only have one. If you could find ways to lower your weight, self-esteem will magically improve.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. Both need to be addressed individually to receive the boost to your overall well-

being you seek. Yes. It is twice the work, but this work results in the real benefits. These improvements will not fade in time. If you can maintain your consistency, they can last forever.

Improving Weight With Diabetes

As mentioned, people who are overweight tend to see some superficial improvements in self-esteem after weight loss. This fact makes weight loss the natural starting point. Want to lose weight, get healthier and feel better? Here's how:

Plan Your Day

People that do not plan their food consumption for the day are doomed to make bad choices. When you plan out your day's or week's food, you create milestones that you can look forward to meeting.

If it is 11:45 am and you are starving, you know that you only have 15 minutes before you can pull that healthy grilled chicken salad out of your lunch bag. Without planning your lunch, it would be far more tempting to head to fast food or junk food options that seem easy and convenient.

Planning your meals places focus on what you are eating rather than what you are not eating. It allows you to avoid the moments of weakness where impulsivity and bad decisions live.

Beware the Beverages

Drinks have a way of sneaking extra calories, especially sugary calories, into your diet. A typical can of soda can have 150 calories. A few of these daily can do damage to your total calories and your blood sugar.

Rather than cut out all soda drastically, work to slowly reduce the consumption of sugary beverages. This will make the sugar withdrawals easier to manage. Remember, drinking one less can of soda per day will result in losing 15 lbs. at the end of the year. Is that extra soda really worth it?

Next page: Tips for improving your self-esteem, diabetes and weight.

Weigh and Measure

When you begin to plan your food, you put yourself in the position to weigh and measure your food.

Over the years, your perceptions of portions have been skewed. This is another problem to blame on society. Your morning juice might be two servings while your bagel might be three servings. With large portions, your day can fall off track before breakfast is over.

A handy kitchen scale is a useful tool to understand the relationship between weights and portions. Utilizing nutrition-tracking websites and apps is another way to gain a better understanding of what you are eating. The salad you ordered for dinner may have twice the calories as the steak you passed up. More information leads to better choices.

Experiment

You may say that you are not hungry at breakfast time, but experiment with different foods at different times. Try having more protein and fiber at different meals, especially early in the day. Protein and fiber for breakfast help to control blood sugar throughout the day. Try new foods to break the old patterns and routines that led to unhappiness and being overweight.

When you complete the weighing and measuring from above, you will realize how much more you can eat of certain healthy foods. Suddenly, that pile of cauliflower will look more appealing than the tiny stack of chips. Your

experimentation may result in finding a new favorite food that is also a good calorie deal.

Improving Your Self-Esteem

You know that changing your body is only step one. To have the desired results, you have to change your mind as well.

Even if you are not successful with your weight loss goals, improving your self-esteem will lead you towards self-acceptance. Answer these questions to see a better you.

- **What three words/phrases best describe you?** Don't settle for neutral or slightly positive words to describe yourself. Saying that you are kind might be accurate but will not yield the same results as saying you are compassionate or altruistic. Get out the thesaurus or search online for innovative ways to describe your character. Be sure to exclude qualifiers from the process. Saying things like "sort of, kind of and sometimes" diminishes from the positive impact. You are motivated. You are devoted. You are very humorous. What else are you?
- **What do you do best?** Everyone has unique talents and abilities. Find yours by taking an accurate inventory of your life. Maybe your skills come in how you relate to others, how you bake amazing apple pies or how you have an uncanny knack for memorizing lines from funny movies. Your strengths make you who you are. Exploit them.
- **What is your biggest accomplishment in the last year?** If diabetes and low self-esteem have been a longstanding part of your life, you might feel that the last year has been free from accomplishments. Continue looking deeper. Achievements come in all shapes and sizes. Were you able to attend all your doctor's appointments? Could you keep your blood sugar under control? Did you make a new friend? Did you exercise more often?
- **What is your favorite possession?** Maybe it's your smile, the flat screen TV hung on the wall or a handmade gift from a friend that you value the most. Listing your prized possession gives a well-rounded picture of your esteem. Adding multiple dimensions makes for balanced sense of self.
- **What are you working on?** Having goals and direction in life limits feelings of sadness and hopelessness. Commonly, people are happier when they have direction, routine and drive to accomplish tasks. Completing those goals adds another achievement to your list and boosts esteem. Be sure to set goals that are reasonable and attainable. Setting goals unrealistically high only ends with disappointment and letdown.

If you find yourself stuck or confused with any of the questions above, employ your trusted supports. People in your life may be well-suited to see the positive qualities in you that you have missed or forgotten. To get maximum benefit from their help, actively work to believe and accept the feedback they give.

Conclusion

Ignore your preconceived notions about weight and self-esteem. The truth is that you can have good self-esteem being overweight, and you can have poor self-esteem while at a healthy weight.

Since the goal is to have the best of both worlds, address your needs independently. Work on the weight and improve the self-esteem through the tips above. These are big issues, but ones worthy of your time and effort since your diabetes will improve along the way. A happier, healthier you begins now.