

Patient Information

Managing Your Diabetes: Beliefs, Barriers, and Benefits

ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS ABOUT LIVING WITH DIABETES IS ALL OF THE DECISIONS YOU HAVE TO MAKE DAY IN AND DAY OUT. MANY PEOPLE WITH DIABETES THINK FONDLY OF THE TIME WHEN THEY COULD JUST LIVE THEIR LIVES AND NOT HAVE TO THINK ABOUT HOW EVERYTHING THEY DO AFFECTS THEIR BLOOD GLUCOSE LEVELS AND FUTURE HEALTH. BUT THERE IS NO GETTING AWAY FROM THE FACT THAT THERE IS A LOT TO DO TO MANAGE YOUR DIABETES WELL.

There are many things that affect what you choose to do: the other demands and priorities in your life, culture, finances, and what is important to you. But there is one area that you might not have thought about before, that experts believe has a big impact on how people with diabetes care for themselves. It is called “perceived treatment efficacy.”

What Is Perceived Treatment Efficacy?

Perceived treatment efficacy is how convinced you are that a healthy action you take—such as getting regular exercise, taking medicines, or making positive changes to what you eat—is really working.

For example, think about the medicines your provider has prescribed for you. Because beliefs influence our behavior, our beliefs about the effectiveness of a medicine influence how likely we are to try it or to keep taking it faithfully.

In other words, if you believe that the advice given to you by your health care team will actually improve your health, then you are more likely to stick with it. If you don't believe it will work, then you are less likely to stick with it.

For example, if you have heard from friends that a certain pill did not work for them or caused a lot of side effects, you may decide not to fill the prescription or take the pill at all. In addition, if you try a treatment for a few days and you do not feel better or see any benefit, you may decide to stop taking it.

You may not even be aware that these beliefs are influencing your decision. Without your even noticing it, what you believe can become a barrier to managing your diabetes.

Changing Beliefs and Changing Behavior

It makes sense that people respond this way. After all, there is enough to do to manage diabetes without doing things that are hard or costly if they do not work. In addition, the benefits for many of the things you do to care for diabetes are not seen or felt right away. Some people feel that all they can get for their efforts is the hope that nothing terrible will happen sometime in the future. That makes it very hard to stay motivated.

But there are things you can do that can help you better figure out whether a treatment is working.

Know what to expect.

Your health care provider, diabetes educator, or pharmacist can help you understand what to expect. Questions you can ask whenever a new medicine or treatment is advised are:

- How does this medicine or treatment work?
- How will I know if it is working?
- What kind of side effects might I have?
- How will this help me and my diabetes?
- How much can I expect this medicine or treatment to lower my blood glucose, blood pressure, or cholesterol?
- How quickly will I see results?
- Are there other medicines or treatments that might work better?
- What could happen if I don't take this medicine or follow your advice?

Know what your numbers mean.

The goal for treating diabetes is to prevent or delay the long-term complications. Your A1C level helps you to understand your risk for these future problems. The closer your A1C is to the target level (usually less than 7%), the lower your risk for getting complications. Keeping track of your A1C levels helps you make informed decisions about how well a treatment or medicine is working.

There are also online risk systems to help you figure out the effects of different treatments or medicines on your long-term risk. You can find these at www.diabetes.org and www.heart.org.

Know yourself.

You can also do some “experiments” at home. Writing down your blood glucose levels gives you a better picture of how your levels are affected by what you do. For example, check before and after you take a 20-minute walk or before and after an exercise to lower your stress level. Check more often whenever you try something new to manage your diabetes or start taking a new medicine.

There is no question that caring for diabetes is largely in your hands. Knowing what benefits are meaningful to you can also help you stick with it, even when caring for your diabetes feels like a struggle. Having more energy, being able to see better, or feeling good about yourself for all your hard work are also benefits that can help you believe in the treatment and believe in yourself.



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