

Feel Well

Chapter 3

A Healthy Relationship

You Will Learn About:

What a healthy relationship is

- a. What is a healthy relationship?
- b. Sexual intimacy and how diabetes impacts it

A Healthy Relationship

What is a healthy relationship?

Healthy relationships are an important part of good health. Relationships act as your social supports. It is important to talk to others to get support. Social supports can include:

- Family
- Friends
- Colleagues
- Your community
- Your place of worship
- Your health care team

How you talk and feel is important for a good relationship. Below is a list of ways you can build healthy relationships:

- Talk about your feelings openly and honestly
- View yourself as a person who has important feelings
- Do not to assume that others know how you feel or think. People cannot read your mind. Tell them what you feel and need. Telling them what you feel will allow you to get the support you want
- Use feeling words when you are talking (such as mad, sad, frustrated and scared)
- Use the word 'I' when talking about your feelings such as, 'I feel angry when you tell me what to eat' or 'I feel sad when I cannot walk as fast as you'
- Be clear and direct about the help you want

To get the support you need, tell your family how you feel.

Sexual intimacy and how diabetes impacts it

All healthy relationships need respect, sharing and trust. In a romantic relationship, intimacy and sexuality are also important. Learn how diabetes can affect sexual intimacy to help you have a healthy relationship.

Sexual intimacy is being physically affectionate with another person (using your body to show that you like someone). Sexual intimacy is important for healthy relationships. Diabetes can cause problems with your sexual intimacy.

For women:

Diabetes can cause sexual dysfunction. Vaginal dryness is a common symptom of sexual dysfunction. Vaginal dryness means you are not able to produce the natural lubricant in your vagina.

Vaginal dryness is twice as common if you have diabetes. Diabetes damages the nerves and slows blood flow to your vagina. This damage causes dryness.

Vaginal dryness causes discomfort and pain during sex. Vaginal dryness also causes trouble with orgasms and can lower your interest in sex. You are not alone. Many women with diabetes have vaginal dryness too. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned.

If you have vaginal dryness, there are still many ways to be intimate with your partner. You can:

- Use lubrication during sex. This will make sex more comfortable. Your health care team may suggest lubrication when you are not having sex too. Using lubrication often may bring you comfort
- Explore parts of your body other than your vagina. Using other body regions allows you to have intimacy in other ways

- Depression, anxiety and stress cause changes in your interest in sex. Talk to your doctor about depression, anxiety and stress
- Manage your blood sugar. High blood sugar can make you more likely to get a yeast infection. Yeast cells live in your vagina. Sugar causes more yeast cells to grow which leads to a yeast infection. In women with diabetes, the fluids in your vagina (vaginal secretions) contain more sugar. This is because you have more sugar in your blood. Yeast infections often cause itching or discomfort around your vagina. You may also notice a white substance that looks like cottage cheese, a bad smell, pain when you pee, and pain during intercourse. Talk to you doctor before you take medicine to treat a yeast infection. These medicines can change the way your other medicines work in your body
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Drinking too much alcohol can cause nerve damage and dehydration (not enough water in your body). Nerve damage and dehydration can lead to vaginal dryness
- Try other ways to be intimate. Such as hugging, snuggling, touching, kissing, massaging, making eye contact, and holding hands. These other ways of intimacy allow you to be close with your partner
- Talk openly with your partner about any sexual problems. Even with the most loving couples, sexual problems can cause a strain on the relationship if you don't discuss concerns in an open and loving way

For men:

Diabetes does not change your fertility (ability to conceive a child).

Diabetes can cause sexual problems. The most common problem is erectile dysfunction (also known as impotence). Erectile dysfunction is when you cannot get or keep an erection long enough to have intercourse. Diabetes

causes damage to the nerves and blood vessels in your penis. This damage causes erectile dysfunction.

Most men – with or without diabetes – will find it hard to have an erection at times. Some factors that can make it hard to have an erection include being tired, stressed, depressed, or drinking too much alcohol. If you find it hard to have an erection at times, it does not always mean you have erectile dysfunction.

Erectile dysfunction is stressful and hard to understand. Erectile dysfunction can cause problems with intimacy and sex. Men with diabetes may not feel like having sex when their blood glucose levels are high. There are many ways to improve intimacy with your partner. You can:

- Manage your diabetes. Managing your diabetes will lower your risk of damage to your nerves and blood vessels in your penis. Avoid damage to lower your chance of erectile dysfunction
- Check your medicines. Some diabetes medicines cause erectile dysfunction (such as some tablets used to treat high blood pressure, depression or stomach ulcers). Talk to your doctor about the medicines you are taking
- Talk to your doctor about depression, anxiety and stress. Depression, anxiety and stress can make you lose interest in sex and make it hard to have an erection
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Drinking too much alcohol can make it hard to have an erection
- Stop smoking. Smoking narrows your blood vessels. Since diabetes and smoking narrow your blood vessels, this will worsen your erectile dysfunction

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- Try other ways to be intimate (such as hugging, snuggling, touching, kissing, massaging, making eye contact, and holding hands). These other ways of intimacy allow you to be close with your partner

Summary

- Healthy relationships are important to your health and wellbeing
- Talk openly with your partner about problems with sexual intimacy
- Find new ways to explore intimacy with your partner