

# Less Stress Can Help Lower Blood Sugar

By Barbara Brody

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You don't need to be a research scientist to understand that emotional turmoil can wreak havoc on your physical health. Ongoing stress causes even more serious trouble: It can make you more likely to get conditions ranging from rheumatoid arthritis to ulcers, and can worsen these ailments if you already have them.

If you have diabetes, stress hormones can raise your blood sugar levels. And recent research shows that people with the disease who are stressed or depressed are more likely to have a stroke, heart attack, or other serious cardiac condition.

## Why Stress Is So Bad for Your Heart

Simply having diabetes hurts your heart. More than 68% of people ages 65 and older with the condition die from heart disease.

The findings from the new study suggest that being stressed long-term or depressed is tied to higher levels of C-reactive protein, a sign of inflammation in the arteries.

Behavior plays a role, too. "It's a catch-22," says Eliot LeBow, LCSW, a psychotherapist and certified diabetes educator. "Attention, concentration, and motivation are all essential to diabetes self-management, but when you're depressed you lack these things and are less likely to take care of yourself."

## The Diabetes-Stress Connection

The physical signs of diabetes can also pose a problem. For example, high blood sugar causes symptoms that can mimic or worsen depression, such as loss of energy, poor recall, and changes in sleep patterns, LeBow says.

Another problem is that people with the disease tend to blame themselves for having it, says Kara Harrington, PhD, a staff psychologist at Joslin Diabetes Center.

Sometimes comments made by friends or family members also get in the way. "People might have told them they're lazy or that they just don't care, but what I usually see is that they care too much." So they end up feeling bad about a high blood sugar reading or a poor A1c test result, she says.

## Get Help

**Find a way to decompress.** Try out meditation, deep breathing, or walking.

**Remember that a number is just a number.** A blood sugar reading simply tells you what to do next, such as take more insulin or have a carbohydrate-rich snack.

**Join a support group.** Whether it's online or in-person, connecting with others who share your condition can help you feel less alone.

**Help raise money for diabetes.** Sign up for a walk-a-thon or other fundraising event. It's a great way to feel more connected.

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