



ADCES7 Self-Care Behaviors

# HEALTHY COPING

## WHAT'S RESILIENCE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

It is not uncommon for people living with diabetes and prediabetes to experience feelings such as fatigue, overwhelm, stress, and frustration. Having these emotions can lead to diabetes distress and diabetes burnout and cause people with diabetes (PWDs) to stop participating in diabetes management behaviors like monitoring glucose levels or administering medication. Suspending diabetes care has a potential to increase the risk of complications that are related to diabetes. This is why it is crucial for people with diabetes to understand coping strategies that work for them in various scenarios.

**According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands”.**

Healthy coping means having a positive attitude toward your diabetes or prediabetes management, as well as positive relationships with others. More specifically, it is how you deal with or overcome a problem. But not all coping skills are created equal. ***So, what's resilience got to do with it?***

Resilience is the ability to withstand and bounce back from adversity. Resilience can help your patients reduce stress and anxiety and improve their coping skills, improving the chances for healthy coping. Among patients with diabetes who experience worsening levels of diabetes-related distress, some are more resistant to deteriorating behavioral and physical effects than others. This is due to resilience and the protective factors that people already have or can build to achieve better diabetes outcomes.

Some people are born with a high resilience level, and others are not. Diabetes Care and Education Specialists, and other healthcare professionals can help their patients to build resilience and healthy coping skills by concentrating on the patient's self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-mastery, optimism, and strength-based resources. For people managing a health condition such as diabetes, healthy coping and resilience can play an important role in times of stress.



## The connection between healthy coping and resilience

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands”.

There are two main types of coping skills: problem-based coping and emotion-based coping. Your job as the clinician is to understand how they differ and determine the best coping strategy to assist your patient.

**Problem-based coping** is helpful when your patient needs to change their situation, perhaps by removing a stressor from their life.

**Emotion-based coping** means taking care of feelings when your patient either can't or doesn't want to change their situation, or when circumstances are out of their control.



Using a tool like the [Brief Resilient Coping Scale](#) can be helpful to assess your patient's ability to cope with stress in adaptive ways.

## Four ways to help your patients with prediabetes and diabetes build resilience



- 1. Let patients know it's ok to “show grace” to themselves**  
Although this saying is deeply rooted in yoga and faith communities, “showing oneself grace” is kindness and forgiveness to ourselves. Help your patients understand they can show themselves grace by giving themselves permission to forgive any mistakes or lapses in judgment when it comes to managing their diabetes.

- 2. Focus on, and celebrate their strengths**

Your patients are more resourceful than they think. Help them to remember this by using a strengths-based (or asset-based) approach. Help them focus on their strengths and not on their deficits. The [strength-based approach](#) allows for people to see themselves at their best in order to see their own value. It then allows a person to move that value forward and capitalize on their strengths rather than focus on their negative characteristics.





### 3. Help your patient to build connections/support system

Connecting with an individual or a group is a reminder that you are not alone in the face of challenges. Help your patients to find ways to connect with others. This could be helping them identify a friend or relative who they can call if they need help or locating an in-person or online support group.

### 4. Help your patients recognize when they might need to seek help

Often our patients don't realize or understand when they might be struggling. This is why empathy and support is extremely important. Help your clients to understand the warning signs of diabetes distress and diabetes burnout. If needed, provide local resources to trained healthcare professionals like social workers, therapists or psychologists that work with PWDs.



## Here's what PWDs want their healthcare professionals to know about helping them deal with stress

1. Use a whole-person, patient centered approach to diabetes care and management. PWDs are more than just their A1C or Time in Range.
2. Provide the appropriate resources for managing stress/burnout
3. Follow up with and maintain communication
4. Show empathy and compassion
5. Acknowledge cultural backgrounds and how culture may influence personal diabetes management
6. Help PWDs plan how to manage stress in the future. Actually take the time to problem solve and forecast based on certain situations and circumstances.
7. LISTEN to what is said and not said, and seek to uncover the real issues that PWDs have that might be the cause for stress and burnout.



## Resources for assessing coping and resilience

The COPE Inventory – assess the different coping strategies people use in response to stress.

The Coping Self-Efficiency Scale – measure an individual's confidence in their coping strategies when it comes to handling challenges and stressors.

Brief Resilient Coping Scale – measure of resilient coping, to capture an individual's ability to cope with stress in highly adaptive ways.



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