

Cultivating Resilience for Lightyears of Diabetes Management

Jessie J. Wong, PhD

Stanford University
Friends for Life
2023



Resilience

“The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.”



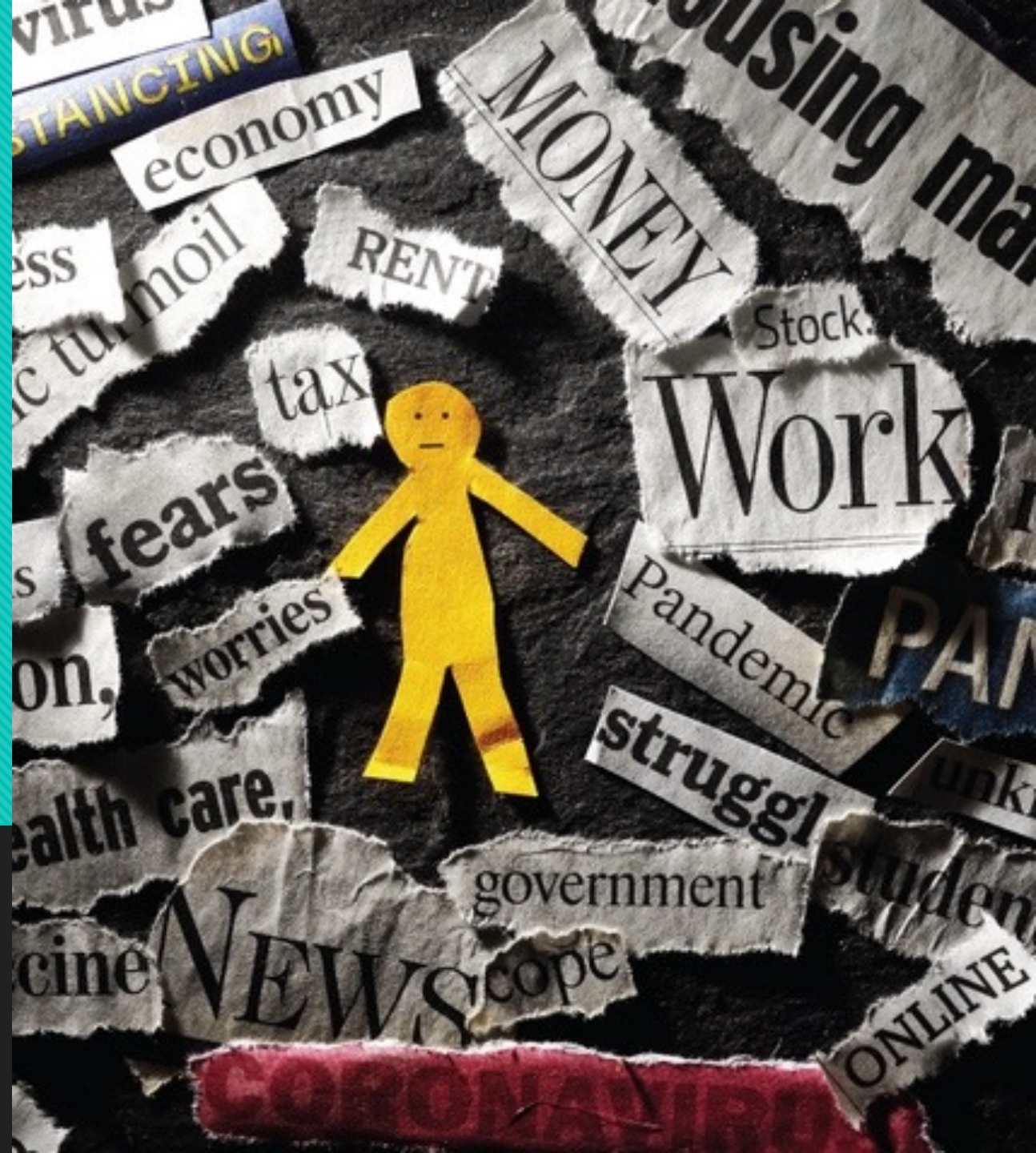
Ways that Diabetes Threatens Resiliency

- Diabetes management is constant, rigorous, and complex
 - Not inherently rewarding
- Time, physical energy, mental energy
 - Monitoring glucose levels
 - Tracking food and counting carbohydrates
 - Treating hyper-/hypoglycemia
 - Managing prescriptions, supplies, and appointments
- Feeling overwhelmed about managing diabetes in the future/rest of your life



And when added to all other life demands...

IT'S A LOT!



Prevention



Cure



How to Know if Resiliency is Compromised



○ Reflect/observe:

- Major life changes
- Sudden in how effortful things feel

○ Ask the question: How am I doing?

○ Look for signs of:

- Diabetes management issues
- Diabetes distress & burnout
- Depression and anxiety

Diabetes Management Issues:

Problems with your blood sugars or diabetes regimen

Signs of Diabetes Management Issues

- Frequent and unexpected highs/lows
- Rollercoaster blood sugars
- Technology problems (failed sensors, problematic insertions)
- Frequent overnight highs/lows
- Consistent blood sugar spikes after meals
- Frequent diabetes-related disruptions to daily tasks
- Feeling that you're falling short of expectations



Diabetes Distress:

Frustration and negative emotions of managing diabetes



Common Signs of Diabetes Distress

- Feeling angry about diabetes
- Frustrations with daily management tasks/burden
- Worrying about not doing enough to manage diabetes
- Avoiding checking blood sugars
- Avoiding diabetes appointments
- Eating more unhealthy foods than normal
- Feeling alone and isolated



Diabetes Burnout:

Reaching a breaking point of burnout with diabetes

Common Signs of Diabetes Burnout

- “All or nothing” thinking
- “Over it”
- Feeling like you can’t do one more diabetes task
- Feeling helpless and hopeless about diabetes
- Doing the bare minimum management to function



Depression and Anxiety:

Mood issues that can be related to diabetes

Depression

2-3x higher prevalence in people living with diabetes

- Examples of symptoms (at least 2 weeks)
 - Irritability
 - Loss of interest/pleasure from previously enjoyable activities
 - Concentration problems
 - Fatigue or loss of energy
 - Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
 - Suicidal thoughts or thoughts about death
- All-encompassing: Impairment across life domains
 - Work, school, relationships, daily life



Anxiety

- Occasional anxiety is a normal part of life
- Intensive, excessive, and persistent anxiety that interferes with functioning is be problematic
- Symptoms of anxiety:
 - Nervous, restless, or tense
 - Trouble concentrating on anything but the current worry
 - Sense of impending danger
 - Increased heart rate, rapid breathing (hyperventilation)
 - Sweating
 - Shaking



Perfectionism and Diabetes

- Perfectionism: A personality style that strives for flawlessness
 - Often fixating on imperfections
 - Trying to control situations
 - Often critical of self or others
- Diabetes is an art, not a science
 - 42 factors affect blood glucose levels
 - Pursuing perfection often causes more harm than good

<https://diatribe.org/42-factors-affect-blood-glucose-surprising-update>

42 Factors that affect Blood Glucose

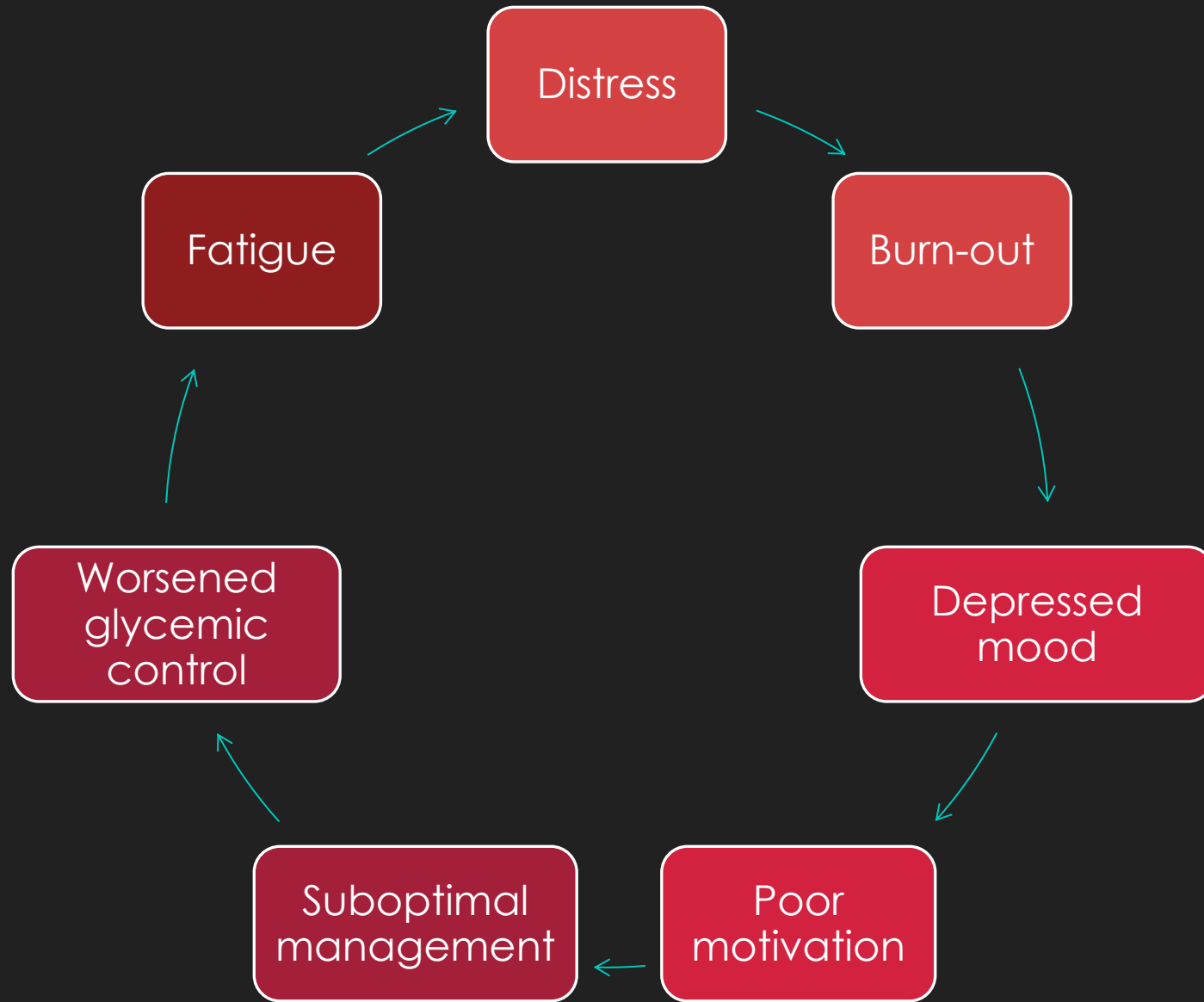
FOOD	BIOLOGICAL
↑↑ 1 Carbohydrate quantity	↑ 20 Too little sleep
→↑ 2 Carbohydrate type	↑ 21 Stress and illness
→↑ 3 Fat	↓ 22 Recent hypoglycemia
→↑ 4 Protein	→↑ 23 During-sleep blood sugars
→↑ 5 Caffeine	↑ 24 Dawn phenomenon
↓↑ 6 Alcohol	↑ 25 Infusion set issues
↓↑ 7 Meal timing	↑ 26 Scar tissue / lipodystrophy
↑ 8 Dehydration	↓↓ 27 Intramuscular insulin delivery
? 9 Personal microbiome	↑ 28 Allergies

MEDICATION	ENVIRONMENTAL
→↓ 10 Medication dose	↑ 34 Expired insulin
↓↑ 11 Medication timing	↓↑ 35 Inaccurate BG reading
↓↑ 12 Medication interactions	↓↑ 36 Outside temperature
↑↑ 13 Steroid administration	↑ 37 Sunburn
↑ 14 Niacin (Vitamin B3)	? 38 Altitude

ACTIVITY	BEHAVIOR & DECISIONS
→↓ 15 Light exercise	↓ 39 More frequent BG checks
↓↑ 16 High-intensity & moderate exercise	↓↑ 40 Default options and choices
→↓ 17 Level of fitness/training	↓↑ 41 Decision-making biases
↓↑ 18 Time of day	↓↑ 42 Family and social pressures
↓↑ 19 Food and insulin timing	

The arrows show the general effect these 42 factors seem to have on blood glucose based on scientific research and/or our experiences at diaTribe. However, not every individual will respond in the same way, so the best way to see how a factor affects you is through your own data: check your blood glucose more often with a meter or wear a CGM and look for patterns.

Read more about the 42 Factors at [diaTribe.org/42FactorsExplained](https://diatribe.org/42FactorsExplained)
Sign up for diaTribe's updates at [diaTribe.org/Join](https://diatribe.org/Join)



Coping Strategies that Threaten Resilience

- Self-blame
- Avoidance
- Taking your stress out on others
- Alcohol/substance use
- Emotional eating



Strategies that Promote Resilience

Check-in with your Diabetes Team



- Sometimes out-of-range blood sugars are signs that your diabetes regimen is not optimized
- Let your team know what is not going well
 - Alarm fatigue
 - Frequent overnight lows
 - Technical issues
 - Diabetes is disrupting important activities
- Ask about potential changes
 - Dose adjustments
 - Devices/technology
 - Providers
- Try to work with them to find a solution that you like

Temper Expectations

- ⬢ Unrealistic expectations can be a major source of stress and frustration
- ⬢ Temper expectations of yourself and others
 - Cut down on daily objectives at work and home
 - Re-evaluate your priorities on a regular basis
- ⬢ Focus on what is needed for safety first
- ⬢ Share your expectations to get feedback
 - Providers, family, friends



Get Involved in Diabetes Communities

⬠ Informal and formal diabetes communities can offer

- Understanding and empathy
- New knowledge and resources

⬠ Helping others can relieve your stress

- Volunteering with events/programs
- Being a mentor/role model to others
- Relieving/preventing stress in others



Diabetes Communities & Resources

- Children with Diabetes - www.childrenwithdiabetes.com
- Brave Buddies - groups.io/g/bravebuddies
- Beyond Type 1 - www.beyondtype1.org
- JDRF – www.jdrf.org
- Diabetes Youth Families - www.dyf.org
- College Diabetes Network - collegediabetesnetwork.org
- Diabetes Education and Camping Association - www.diabetes.camps.org
- American Diabetes Association - www.diabetes.org

Cover Basic Needs

⬢ Are your basic needs being met?

- Easy to lose track

⬢ Check-in with yourself

- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Supplies/resources
- Social support/connection



"Diabetes Vacation"



- Time-limited handover of diabetes management tasks and responsibilities
- Parent, friend, spouse, school nurse, family member
- Be sure the person has the skills and knowledge necessary
- Agree on what will need to happen
 - Tasks
 - Interactions (no nagging!)
- Pick a start and end time
- A short break, especially when taken regularly, can have huge benefits
 - **Bonus:** whoever helps will have a better understanding of what it's like to live with diabetes

Problem-Solving

Specify Problem

Be as precise as possible

Focus on one problem at a time

Brainstorm

Generate many ideas

Think outside box, be open-minded

Pick a Solution

Evaluate pros & cons of each idea

Select one to try first

Implement

Create a specific plan to implement solution

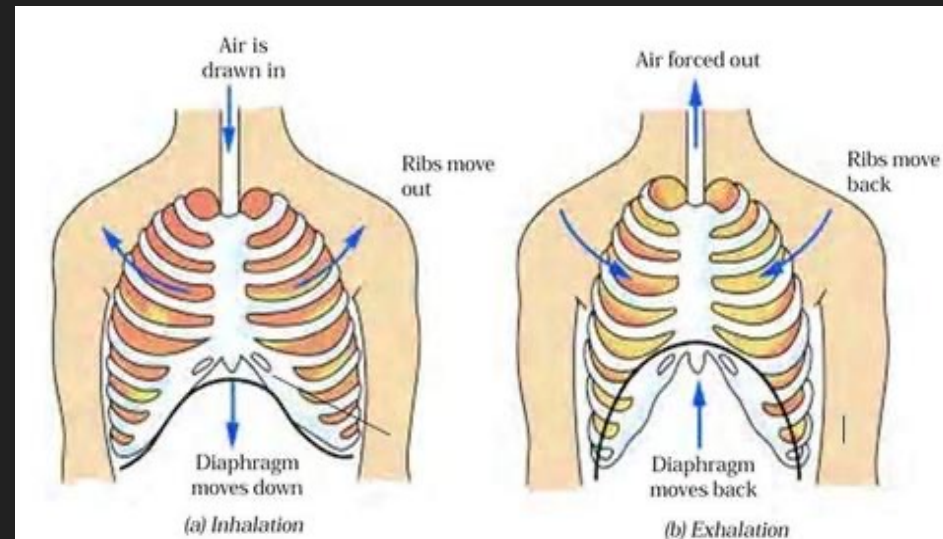
How did it go?

Well: Great, reinforce & carry on!

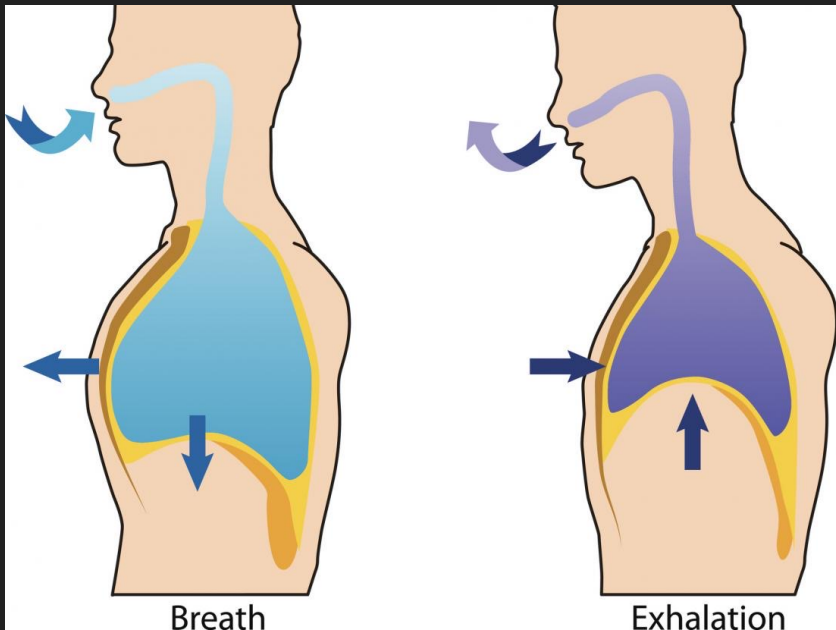
Not well: Go back to solution list and try again

Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Stress can impact our breathing and our breathing can impact our mood and thinking
- The diaphragm is the major muscle used for breathing
- Breathing deeply from the diaphragm can help:
 - Counteracts physiological stress signals
 - Prevent hyperventilation
 - Alleviates overall stress
- We all use diaphragmatic breathing in our sleep



Diaphragmatic Breathing: How To



1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Place one hand on your belly and the other on your upper chest.
3. Slowly inhale through your nose, counting slowly to 3.
4. Slowly exhale through the mouth, counting slowly to 3. *The key is in the exhale.*
5. You should feel the lower hand on your abdomen move out with the inhalation and in with the exhalation. The top hand on the chest should remain relatively still.

Distraction



- ⬡ For stressors you cannot control or influence
 - DO NOT use for stressors that need to be addressed
- ⬡ Mental break from worrying about what you cannot change:
 - Upcoming medical bill
 - Past diabetes visit/A1c result
 - Fear of others judging you about diabetes
- ⬡ Do something fun, interesting, engrossing
- ⬡ Postponing worrying
- ⬡ Distraction is not avoidance

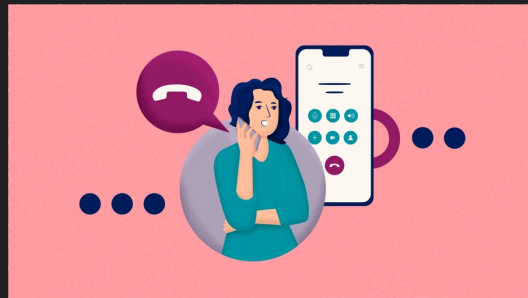
Take a Walk

- ⬡ Physical movement, being outdoors, change of context, and fresh air can all reduce stress and improve mood
 - Even a short, leisurely walk
- ⬡ Pair with a pleasurable activity
 - Walk with a friend/pet
 - Listen music/podcast
 - Call a friend/relative



Look into Mental Health Services

- ⬢ ADA Directory of mental health providers who received training in diabetes: https://professional.diabetes.org/mhp_listing
- ⬢ Psychology Today website: www.psychologytoday.com
- ⬢ To access mental health services in your insurance network, call the phone number on your health plan/insurance card



Prefer to Wait and See if Things Improve?

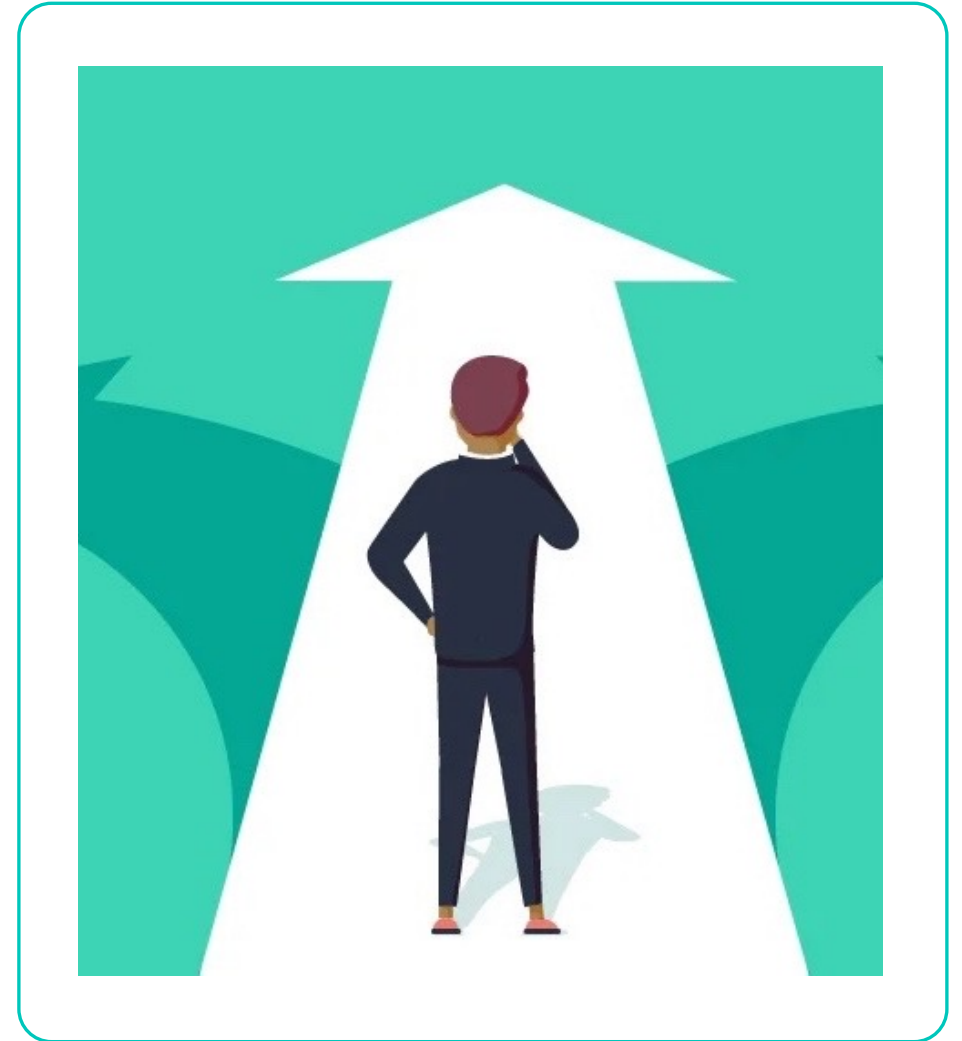


- If you are struggling but hesitant to do something, make a plan
 - What is a sign that I need more help than I am getting?
 - If that sign comes up, what is the first step I will take?
 - If I am struggling and don't know how to get help or what to do, who should I turn to?
- It is hard to figure out a plan and take action when you are really struggling
 - Making a plan can help, even if you never use it

Prioritizing Everything Else?

Remember:

- Investing just a small amount of energy in coping strategies can have huge payoffs
- Self-care is NOT selfish
- Taking care of diabetes can improve physical and mental health outcomes and improve how well you are doing in other areas of your life



**You cannot
pour from an
empty cup**



Take Aways

- Diabetes management issues, diabetes distress and burnout, and emotional distress are usually signs that **something isn't right**
 - **NOT** something wrong with you
- Look out for signs of issues or distress so you can address them sooner than later
- Choose strategies that match your preferences and different situations

Thank you!

Q&A

Discussion

Jessie J. Wong, Ph.D.

Email: wongjj@stanford.edu

Cut-back on Stress-inducing Factors

- ⬢ Reconsider where to set your CGM alerts
- ⬢ Consider cutting back on:
 - Social media use
 - Alcohol/drug use
 - Unhealthy eating
 - Interacting with people who cause you stress
 - Extracurricular/voluntary activities
 - Over-extending yourself
- ⬢ Even a short break can have big benefits

