



# Stress Management Tools for People with Diabetes

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# Stress and Diabetes

**MORE  
THAN  
JUST  
NUMBERS**

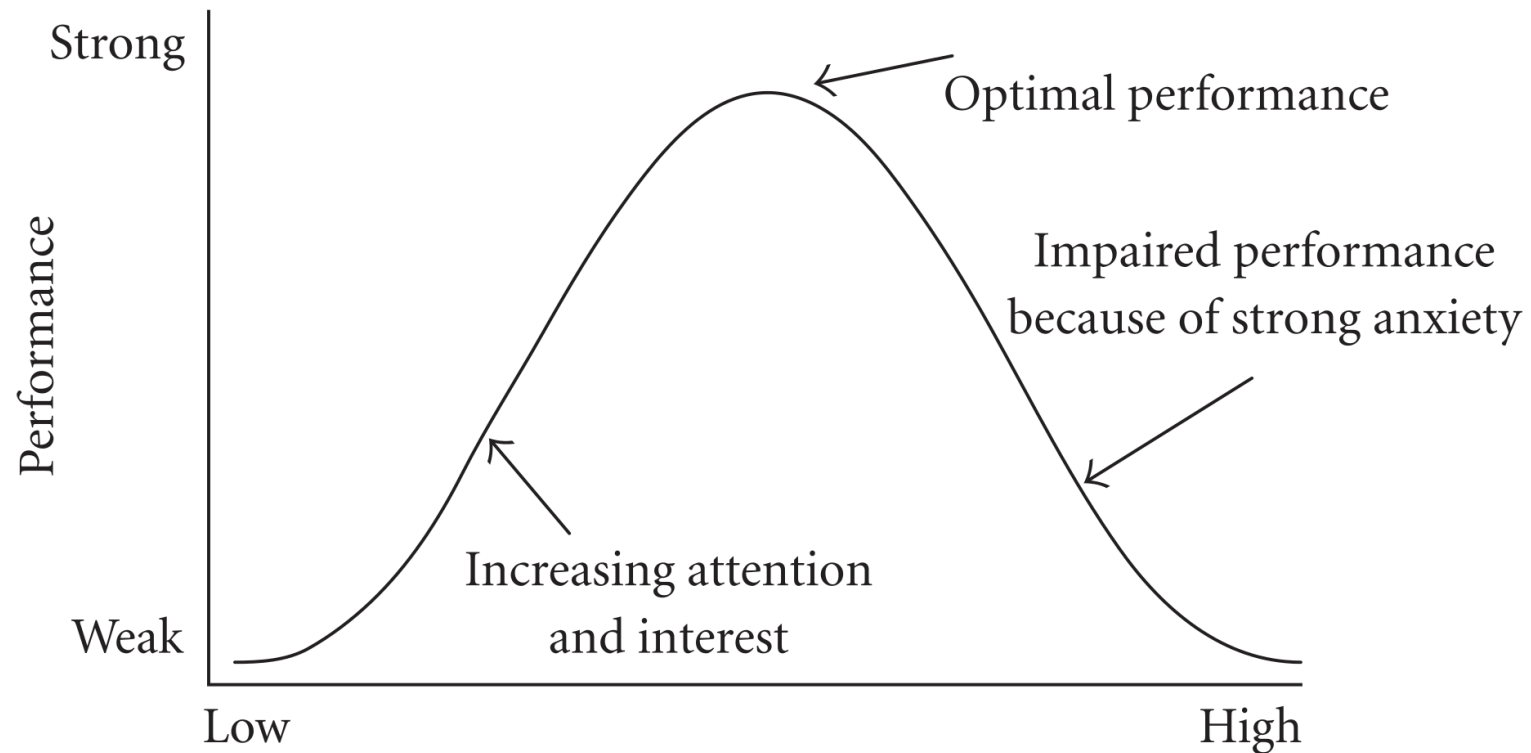
- Diabetes management is constant, rigorous, and complex
- Even routine diabetes tasks/demands can induce stress
- Time and energy for diabetes can also increase stress in other areas of life

Stress is a normal human reaction that happens to everyone.

The human body is designed to experience stress and react to it physically and mentally.



# Yerkes-Dodson Law



# Common signs of distress

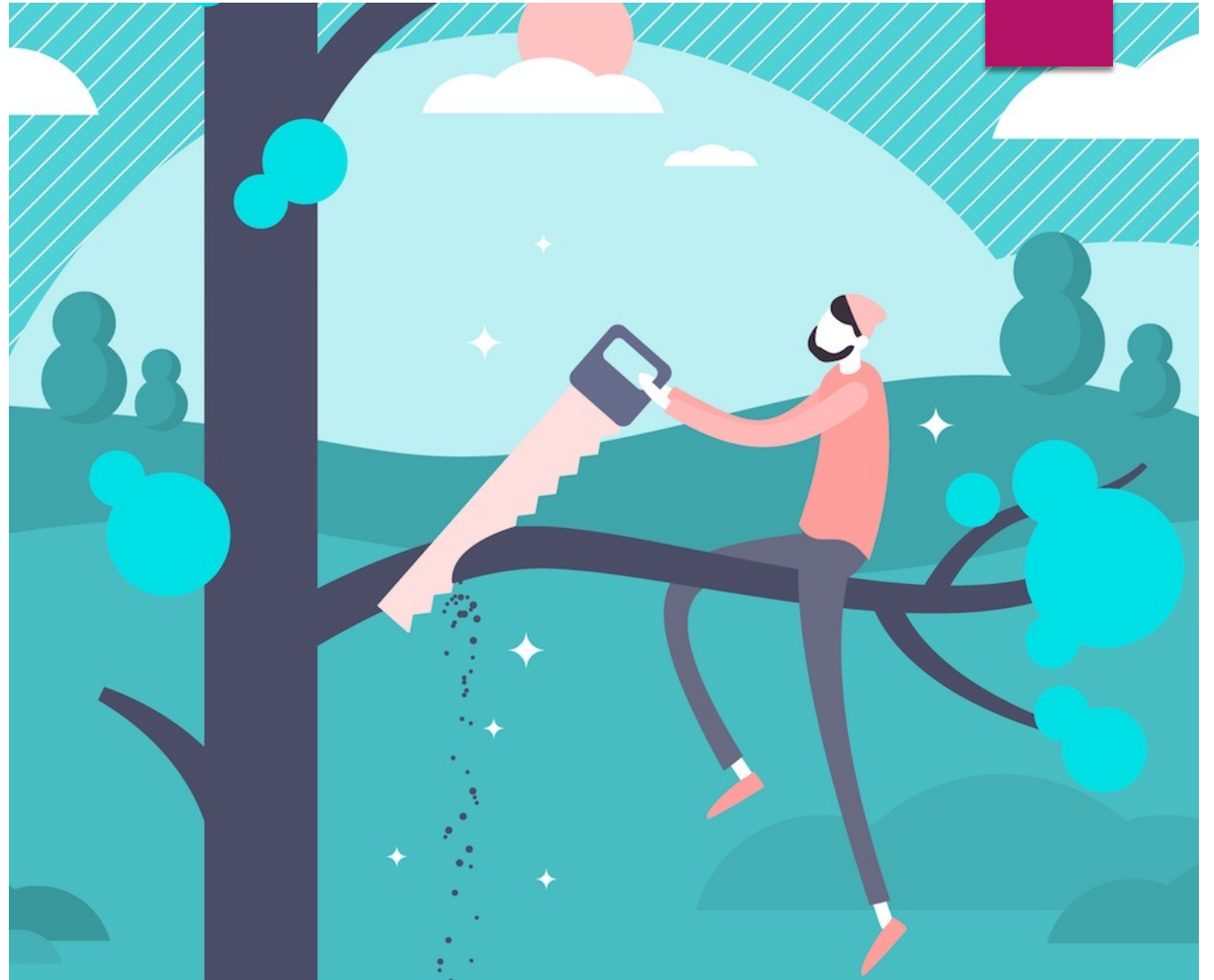
- Feelings of numbness, disbelief, anxiety or fear.
- Changes in appetite, energy, and activity levels.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Difficulty sleeping or nightmares and upsetting thoughts and images.
- Physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and skin rashes.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Anger or short-temper.
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

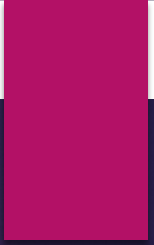
Other symptoms may include:

- Fatigue
- Illness
- Feeling on guard/easily startled
- Withdrawal
- Guilt
- Irritability
- Excessive worry

# Unhelpful Stress Management Tools

- ▶ Self-blame
- ▶ Blaming others (without trying to change anything)
- ▶ Avoidance
- ▶ Taking your stress out on others
- ▶ Alcohol/substance use
- ▶ Emotional eating





# The Key to Stress Management:

DON'T RELY ON JUST ONE TOOL...  
BUILD A TOOLBOX

# Self-Awareness

## ⬠ Be aware of your stress levels

- What are the signs you are stressed?
- What triggers your stress?

## ⬠ Anticipating stress can help prevent it



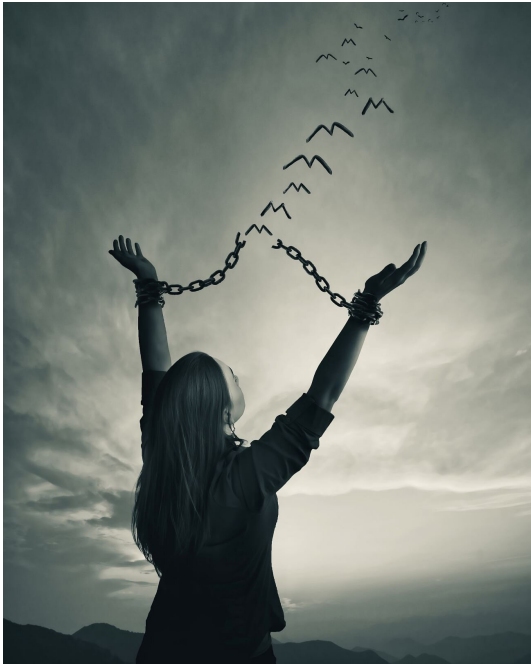


# Temper Expectations

- ⬢ 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
- ⬢ Share your expectations to get feedback
  - Providers, family, friends
- ⬢ Ask yourself “Is this really worth the stress?”



# Distraction



- ⬢ Distraction vs avoidance
- ⬢ Do something fun/engaging
- ⬢ Best for stressors that you cannot do anything about
  - Worry about an upcoming medical bill
  - Stress over previous appointment/A1c result
  - Worry over others judging you for having diabetes
- ⬢ Postponing worrying
- ⬢ DO NOT use for stressors that need to be addressed

# Cover Basic Needs

⬠ Are your basic needs being met?

- Easy to lose track

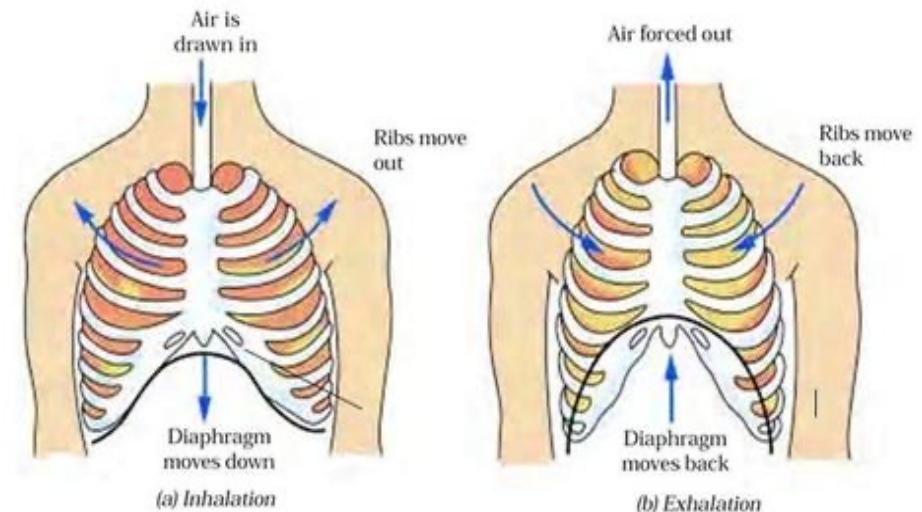
⬠ Check-in with yourself

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

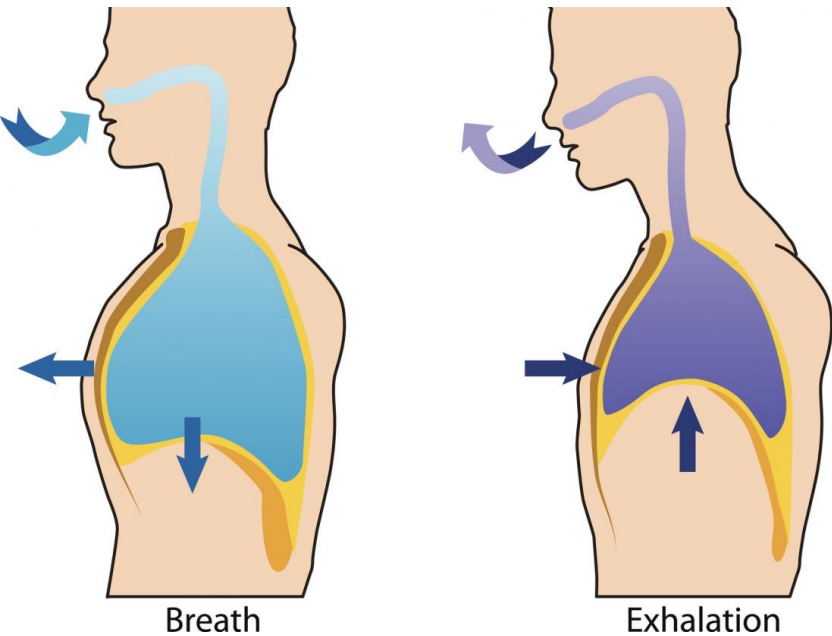


# Diaphragmatic Breathing

- ▶ The diaphragm is the major muscle used for breathing: a thin, dome-shaped muscle that separates the chest from the abdominal (belly).
- ▶ Breathing deeply from the diaphragm can help:
  - ▶ Increase the lungs capacity to oxygenate your blood
  - ▶ Prevent hyperventilation and panic attacks
  - ▶ Counteracts physiological stress signals
  - ▶ Alleviates overall stress



# Diaphragmatic Breathing: How To



1. Sit in a comfortable position with back straight and feet on the floor.
2. Place one hand on your belly and the other on your upper chest. 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.
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.

# Take a Walk

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



# Connect with Others



❖ Connecting with others can have many benefits

- Put things into perspective
- New ideas/advice
- Validation and assurance
- Breaks the cycle of stress

❖ Consider who in your life you would be willing to reach out to

- Mild stress vs major stress
- Who can support you? And how?

# 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





# 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

# Problem-Solving with your Diabetes Team



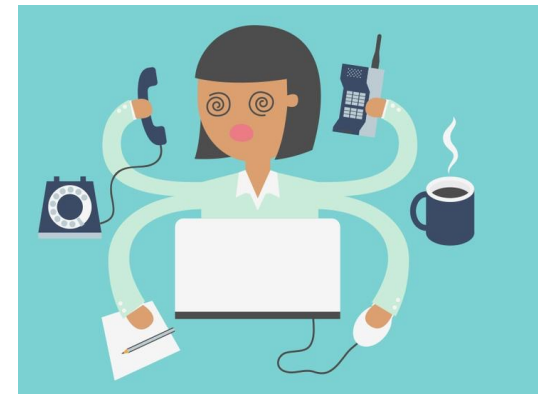
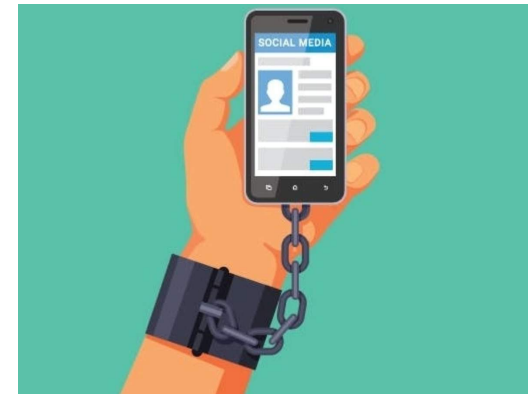
- ▶ Let your team know what is not going well and what might be causing you distress
  - ▶ Alarm fatigue
  - ▶ Adhesive problems
  - ▶ Frequent overnight lows
  - ▶ Technical issues
  - ▶ Diabetes is disrupting important activities
- ▶ Ask about potential changes
  - ▶ Dose adjustments
  - ▶ Devices/technology
  - ▶ Providers
- ▶ Try to work with them to find a solution that you like

# Cut-back on Stress-inducing Factors

## Consider cutting back on:

- Social media use
- Alcohol/drug use
- Unhealthy eating
- Interacting with people who cause you stress
- Shows/movies that cause stress
- Extracurricular/voluntary activities
- Over-extending yourself

## Even a short break can have big benefits



# Summary of Tools

## Cognitive:

- Self-awareness
- Temper expectations
- Distraction

## Behavioral/Actions:

- Cover basic needs
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Take a walk
- Cut back on stress-inducing factors

## Cognitive + Behavioral:

- Problem-solving
- Problem-solving with diabetes team

## Social:

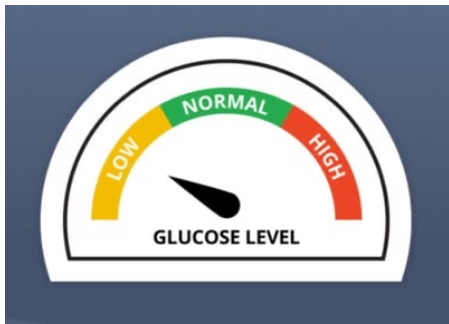
- Connect with others
- Get involved

# Choosing the Right Tool

- ▶ These tools work differently for different **people** AND for different **situations**
- ▶ When choosing a stress management tool consider:
  - ▶ Is this stressor something that I need to/can do something about?
    - ▶ Treating a high vs worrying about an upcoming diabetes appointment
  - ▶ What strategies will relieve my stress in the moment?
  - ▶ What strategies will relieve my stress in the long-term?



# Special Consideration: Highs & Lows



- ▶ Hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia can both impact your mood and thinking
  - ▶ Irritability, stress, anger, impaired judgement, fatigue
- ▶ Focus on simple strategies that will not just manage stress, but also **help you manage the high/low**
- ▶ Do **not** focus on self-blame or problem-solving during a high/low
  - ▶ Save identifying causes and/or problem-solving for the future until your blood sugars are back in range and you're feeling better

# Choosing a Tool Example: Nighttime Highs



You have been stressed because your (your child's) blood glucose levels have been going high every night for the past few weeks and you can't get them down.

**Which strategies would you considering using?**

# Choose a Tool Example: Feeling Overwhelmed



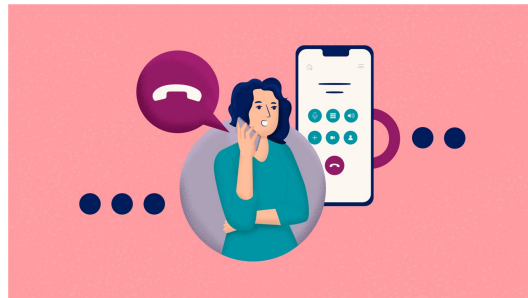
Work/school is really busy and there are lots of family events coming up. Diabetes management is going well, but it's been stressful to keep up with everything. You feel like if any little thing goes wrong, everything will fall apart.

**Which strategies would you considering using?**



# Other Resources

- ⬢ CDC recommendations for managing anxiety:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- ⬢ ADA Directory of mental health providers who received training in diabetes:  
[https://professional.diabetes.org/mhp\\_listing](https://professional.diabetes.org/mhp_listing)
- ⬢ To access mental health services in your area, call the designated number on health plan/insurance card



# Take-Aways

A top-down view of a wooden workbench covered with an assortment of tools. The tools include several open-end wrenches of different sizes, a pair of yellow-handled pliers, a hammer with a black and yellow handle, a screwdriver with a black and yellow handle, and a pair of black-handled pliers. There are also several screws and nails scattered around the tools. The background is a light-colored wood grain.

- ▶ Diabetes and life can bring stress
- ▶ There are lots of different stress management tools to consider
- ▶ The best tool is the one that fits you and the situation



# Thank you!

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME AT: [WONGJJ@STANFORD.EDU](mailto:WONGJJ@STANFORD.EDU)

### Cognitive:

- Self-awareness
- Temper expectations
- Distraction

### Behavioral/Actions:

- Cover basic needs
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Take a walk
- Cut back on stress-inducing factors

### Cognitive + Behavioral:

- Problem-solving
- Problem-solving with diabetes team

### Social:

- Connect with others
- Get involved