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Psychological Help to a Diabetic Patient Important to Improve Outcomes

14 November 2019 | Views

Dr. Manoj Khandelwal, Associate Consultant- Diabetes and Endocrinology , Fortis Escort Hospital, Jaipur shares his views on the how psychological help is important to improve outcomes



Diabetes is a lifestyle disease in some, in others it can be caused by a genetic anomaly. Irrespective of the reason you get diabetes, chances are that the treatment will be lifelong. Globally, diabetes has emerged as a leading, chronic metabolic disorder impacting the physical, social and mental including psychological well-being of the affected people. Addressing these psychosocial aspects that include emotional, cognitive, behavioural and social factors in the treatment may help overcome the adherence-related psychological barriers of self-care for diabetes patients. Since diabetes is a chronic disease that requires lifelong treatment in most of the patients, understanding the importance of psychological help such as counselling can facilitate the ultimate goal of managing the disease in patients with diabetes.

Psychological problems of a diabetic patient

Many of the people suffering from diabetes also suffer from anxiety, stress, and find it difficult to adjust to the new, often moderated lifestyle that the new health status demands. Anxiety disorders are higher in patients with diabetes than in the rest of the population: generalized anxiety disorder is 3 times higher in people with diabetes.

Stress is often associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. When under stress, the body signals its nervous system and pituitary gland to produce epinephrine and cortisol, known as stress hormones. When these hormones are released, the liver produces more glucose. Many see consuming alcohol as a means to address this stress. This jeopardises the situation – alcohol has high sugar content. When taken to contain stress, both the factors together are likely to push up the sugar levels. This is the reason why diabetics are prohibited from consuming alcohol at all. Continuing lifelong treatment also causes depression in some of the diabetic patients. Such patients may disrupt prescribed medication which is likely to pose a risk to their health and shot up the glucose levels.

Seeking psychiatric help for diabetes patient

We must overcome our own inhibitions about seeking psychological help. Psychological care should be integrated with medical care to quality of life by optimising health outcomes. Many find it hard to accept that they have developed a medical condition that may require lifelong treatment. Psychologists can help address the emotional reactions in such patients such as disbelief, guilt and anxiety and help them learn how to accept their condition. While psychological training should be seamlessly woven into the treatment, it is important to keep a tab on the patients and screen them regularly for traces of mental health-related issues. Anxiety symptoms such as avoiding people, social withdrawal, repetitive movements, should be noticed and addressed promptly. In adults, medical staff should be sensitive about addressing their queries related to sexual functioning and pregnancy, to mention a few. Many patients find it challenging to adapt to the necessary lifestyle changes, including changing their diet. Psychologists can help these patients change their behaviours and gradually improve eating habits and activity levels as well as help learn effective strategies to ensure they regularly test sugar levels and take their medications.