

# *Facing diabetes grief*

## Stages of Grief

### 1. Shock and Denial

This tends to occur immediately after diagnosis. It can be particularly difficult because with chronic illnesses, there is not a lot of room for denial. It can become dangerous if it leads to being unable to take the necessary steps to get treatment.

### 2. Pleading and Bargaining

In this stage, we want life to be what it was or could be without diabetes. We tend to find fault in ourselves, wondering what we could have done differently. We bargain with the illness or with a higher power and often feel a sense of guilt.

### 3. Anger

Anger is often felt when diabetes holds us back from doing things we would like to do, and often reappears at different points. It can be directed inward or outward to doctors and loved ones as we look for someone to blame. Anger can be a necessary stage of the healing process - the more you feel it, the more it will subside.

### 4. Anxiety and Depression

This stage can also reappear at different times of our lives. Depression can feel like it will last forever but it will subside. It is also a completely appropriate response to a life-altering situation. Anxiety can be about the future, not being able to live up to expectations, social situations, medical bills, and more. This stage can be harmful if it leads to skipping medication or doctor's appointments.

### 5. Acceptance and Hope

Acceptance doesn't necessarily mean being okay with it but we accept that diabetes is a permanent part of our life. We start adapting to our new normal and finding new things that bring us joy.



## Cycle of Grief

When we grieve death or a terminal illness, there is an end and an opportunity for resolution and closure. When grieving a chronic illness, grief is not a linear process but rather a cycle or continuous spiral. It is harder to reach acceptance because we don't have a chance to complete the grieving process. This process is often erratic and unpredictable, needing constant readjustment. Some stages may be revisited numerous times.



## Many Losses

There are **physical losses**, aka the loss of good health and wellness. However, with diabetes and other chronic illnesses, there are also "**network losses**," such as loss of comfort, self-efficacy, freedom, intimacy, pride, joy, self-esteem, self-control, independence, mental health, hope, dignity, and/or certainty. These can be just as important as physical losses.



## Social Support

**Social support is key.** Having people who listen to and understand you helps you work through your feelings and reduces your sense of isolation. Talking to people who are going through the same thing can be particularly helpful and provides a safe space to talk about the difficult experiences of grief.

If you find it hard to talk about your grief, it can be helpful to write it down instead.

## *What Can I Do?*



- Seek out social support
- Find a creative outlet
- Surround yourself with positive people to filter out internal negativity
- Inform yourself about diabetes
- Pamper yourself
- Find new interests, structures, and routines
- Practice breathing, relaxation, and mindfulness techniques
- Be kind to yourself