

# SPECIAL FEATURE

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**Deadlines to meet, bills to pay, frustration with people, or juggling with the demands of work and parenthood. These are all events that can cause stress. Stress is your body's response to a perceived danger or risk, whether real or imagined. It is your body's way of telling us that something has upset our normal equilibrium. At times, stress is not a bad thing as it may motivate you to do better or succeed. But sometimes, stress can affect you in a negative way.**

## The body's response to stress

Our body has an immediate reaction to stress — your blood sugar level shoots up and your heart kicks into action and begins working harder. This extra effort from your heart can take a toll on your arteries, veins, and heart and make your blood pressure rise. Over the long term, chronic stress can strain various systems in the body, including the digestive, kidney, and immune systems.

## Can stress cause diabetes?

Although there are studies linking increased stress with higher risk of diabetes, there is no conclusive evidence to show that

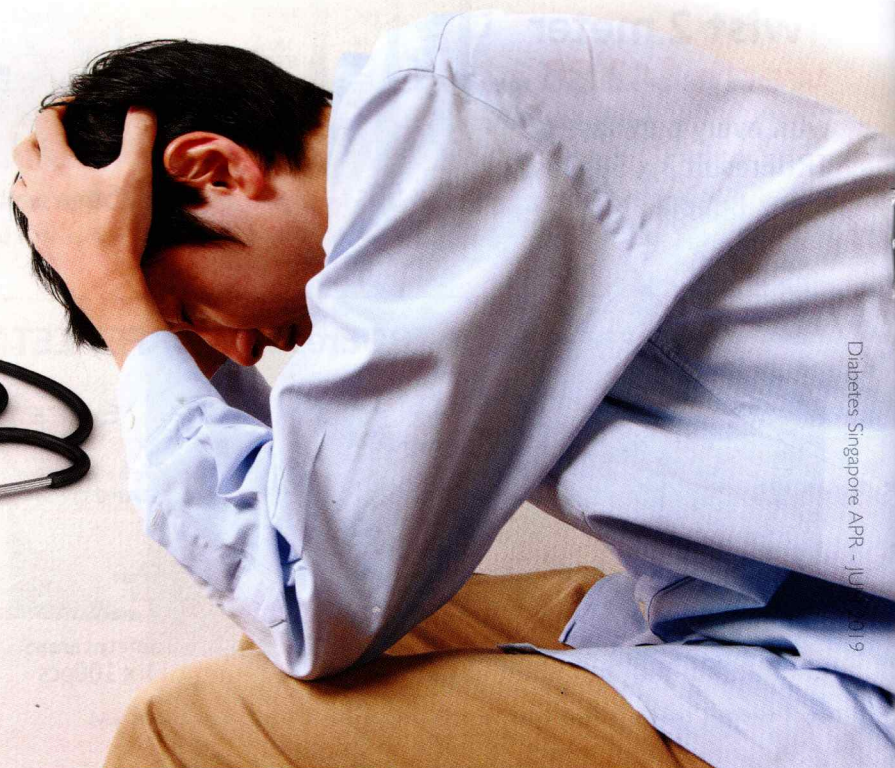
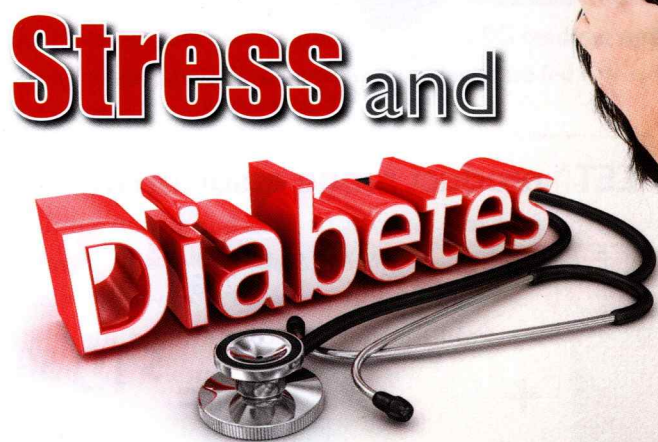
prolonged high stress can lead to diabetes. Stress can raise the blood sugar level, but it does not directly result in diabetes. Stress can also lead to poor decision-making, unhealthy eating and lack of exercise, resulting in increased body weight (a risk factor for diabetes) and higher risk of developing diabetes.

## Stress and blood sugar control in diabetes

Stress can cause high blood sugar levels as well as interfere with your self-care of diabetes. When your blood sugar level is not under control, you may feel less able to cope with stress and more easily affected by things. It is important to manage both stress and diabetes as they can interact with each other.

The ways stress can lead to poor lifestyle choices affecting blood sugar control:

- **Poor sleep**  
When you are under a lot of stress, your sleep may be quite disrupted. You may find yourself not sleeping well and feeling tired. Your blood sugar level will increase due to lack of sleep or poor sleep.
- **Smoking or drinking too much**  
You may also turn to "quick fix" ways to relieve your stress by smoking more cigarettes or drinking more alcohol.
- **Lack of exercise**  
You may not feel like bothering about your diabetes treatment and find yourself too tired to do any exercise.



- **Poor eating**

Some of us may engage in comfort eating when stressed, thus worsening blood sugar control.

## Stress in diabetes management

Unfortunately, at times, diabetes management itself can be a huge source of stress! Being diagnosed with diabetes causes some emotional distress in most people. The required lifestyle changes (exercise, diet changes, avoidance of smoking and drinking) do involve a lot of effort, thus creating stress. Having to take blood sugar lowering medications regularly is also a factor that can increase stress. Some individuals become stressed when they see their self-monitored blood sugar levels being too high or too low. Sometimes even seeing the doctor for diabetes generates stress in certain people.

## Stress management in people with diabetes

### 1 Set clear goals for diabetes management

Setting goals can help you feel less overwhelmed by diabetes. Make 3 or 4 very specific goals about what you will do to take care of your diabetes. For example, decide to pack your own healthy lunch 3 days a week.

### 2 Create medication reminders

Struggling to remember to take your medications on time? Set an alarm on your phone or digital calendar to remind yourself. You might also use a pill-box to keep medications organized.

### 3 Keep your regular appointments with your doctor

Don't miss a check-up. Each appointment is an important opportunity to check in with your doctor. Between visits, write down problems, questions, and anything else you want to discuss at your next appointment.

### 4 Enlist help with cooking

If shopping, planning, and preparing healthy foods has you feeling stressed, ask a family member or friend to take on some of those responsibilities. Or you might see a dietician for help in planning easy, healthy meals.



### 5 Break exercise into manageable blocks

Don't get stressed because you can't find time to exercise. Break exercise up into shorter, more manageable amounts. Schedule a 10-minute walk after each meal to meet the goal of 30 minutes of daily exercise.

### 6 Go to bed at the same time every night

Consistency helps ease stress. Choose a time that allows you to get at least 6 (up to 8) hours of sleep. Limit caffeine intake to once a day and before 6 pm. Have a warm shower to help relax before bed.

### 7 Practice deep breathing or relaxation exercises

Take a few minutes each day to simply breathe and visualize letting go of your stress. Try deep breathing or muscle relaxation exercises.

### 8 Find ways to let the worry roll off your back

Don't let the challenges of diabetes diminish the joys of everyday life. Take time every day to do something you enjoy. Make it a point to visit friends and family. Get in a daily laugh, whether it's by watching a favorite show or catching up with a funny friend. Make the changes that you are able to and learn to accept the fact that you can't change everything.

## Conclusion

Although stress does not directly lead to diabetes, it can result in various factors that increase the risk of developing diabetes. Stress management is an important part of improving your overall health and your diabetes. If stress management is a struggle for you, consider talking to your doctor or a therapist. Your emotional health is just as important as your physical health, especially when you're managing a chronic condition like diabetes.

#### About the author:

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