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Acceptance and Diabetes:

Helping patients integrate diabetes into their lives

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Case Studies in Avoidance and Diabetes



Meet Alana

- Alana is a 21 year old college student who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes about 8 years ago
- She's extremely anxious about and overwhelmed by her school work and to cope she binge eats
- Alana believes that she has to make a choice between managing her diabetes and focusing on school – and school usually wins



Meet Craig

- Craig is 54 years old and has been living with type 2 diabetes for over 20 years and is currently on dialysis
- He needs to lose weight and lower his A1C before he can get on the transplant list
- Craig's diabetes-related shame and embarrassment is his biggest barrier to making these changes



Meet Grant

- Grant is 35 years old and was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes about 4 years ago
- Over the past year, he has been in the hospital with DKA because he was not taking insulin regularly
- Grant recently started a new job and has not been able to tell any of his co-workers that he has diabetes



Avoidance vs. Acceptance

(and how does it relate to diabetes)?



“You can’t stop the waves, but
you can learn to surf.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

Avoidance and Diabetes

- Diabetes can feel overwhelming
- People develop coping strategies for diabetes-related stress
- One of the most common coping strategies is avoidance



Types of Avoidance

- Behavioral Avoidance
- Cognitive Avoidance
- Emotional Avoidance



Common Presentations of Diabetes Avoidance

- Check blood glucose infrequently and 'forget' to take medications
- Hide diabetes from others
- Cancel appointments with healthcare team
- Mindless food choices



Acceptance and Diabetes

- Negative emotions and thoughts about diabetes are not easy to control
- However people can control how they engage with these negative thoughts and emotions
- Acceptance means 'making room' for discomfort



What Acceptance and Diabetes Is Not

- Enthusiasm about having diabetes
- Ignoring or pushing away negative diabetes-related thoughts, emotions or experiences
- Satisfaction with the status quo



Common Barriers to Acceptance

- Mindlessness
- Cognitive fusion
- Cognitive inflexibility
- Difficulty with distress tolerance





Key Takeaways


- Avoidance is a common coping strategy
- Avoidance takes on many forms
- Acceptance means ‘making room’ as opposed to avoiding

Polling Question

According to a study published in 2014, which of the following was shown to be an independent predictor of frequency of blood glucose monitoring?

- A. Insulin use
- B. Age
- C. Avoidance behavior
- D. Diabetes duration

Polonsky, W. H., Fisher, L., Hessler, D., & Edelman, S. V. (2014). What is so tough about self-monitoring of blood glucose? Perceived obstacles among patients with Type 2 diabetes. *Diabetic Medicine*, 31(1), 40-46.

A photograph of an elderly couple standing on a sandy beach. The woman, on the left, is wearing a white bucket hat, a white button-down shirt over a dark blue tank top, and has her hands on her hips. The man, on the right, is wearing a white zip-up sweater and has his arm around the woman's shoulder. Both are smiling broadly. The background shows the ocean waves and a clear sky.

Assessing Acceptance

Assessment Tools

- Acceptance of Disability Scale (modified)
- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2)
- Patients' language



Acceptance of Disability Scale (ADS)

ADS is a self-report inventory developed to assess four factors of individuals with physical disabilities:

- Enlargement of scope of values
- Subordination of physique
- Containment of disability effects
- Transformation from comparative values to asset values



ADS and Diabetes

ADS has been used to assess acceptance in people with diabetes by replacing the word 'disability' with the word 'diabetes':

- **Enlargement of scope of values:** 'There are many things a person with my type of diabetes is able to do'
- **Subordination of physique:** 'My diabetes affects those aspects of life which I care most about'



ADS and Diabetes

(cont.)

- **Containment of disability effects:** 'Almost every area of life is closed to me because of my diabetes'
- **Transferring from comparative values to asset values:**
'Though I can see the progress I am making in my rehabilitation, this is not very important as I can never become normal'



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Questionnaire - 2

- **AAQ-2** is a 10-item scale that assesses a person's experiential avoidance and immobility and acceptance and action.

Bond, F. W., et al. (2011). Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance. Behavior therapy, 42(4), 676-688.



Acceptance & Action

Questionnaire - 2

AAQ-2

Below you will find a list of statements. Please rate how true each statement is for you by circling a number next to it. Use the scale below to make your choice.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never true	very seldom true	seldom true	sometimes true	frequently true	almost always true	always true

1. Its OK if I remember something unpleasant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My painful experiences and memories make it difficult for me to live a life that I would value.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I'm afraid of my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I worry about not being able to control my worries and feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My painful memories prevent me from having a fulfilling life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I am in control of my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Emotions cause problems in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. It seems like most people are handling their lives better than I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Worries get in the way of my success.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. My thoughts and feelings do not get in the way of how I want to live my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Bond, F. W., et al. (2011). Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance. Behavior therapy, 42(4), 676-688.

Language patients use

Often, the best way to assess acceptance and diabetes is by listening to the language patients use. Some examples include:

- *I'm not very good at managing diabetes ...*
- *I'll focus on diabetes when I feel less overwhelmed ...*
- *No matter how hard I try, I can't control my feelings about diabetes ...*
- *I can't handle diabetes ...*
- *If I felt less anxious, I could manage manage my diabetes ...*





Key Takeaways

Often, the best ways to assess for acceptance is to listen to how people talk about diabetes:

- Flexible or Rigid
- Empowered or Helpless
- Integrated or Segmented

Polling Question

Which of the following has NOT been shown to be correlated to non-acceptance of diabetes?

- A. Increased HbA1c
- B. Reduced self-care behavior
- C. Depressive symptoms
- D. Diabetes duration

Schmitt, A., Reimer, A., Kulzer, B., Haak, T., Gahr, A., & Hermanns, N. (2014). Assessment of diabetes acceptance can help identify patients with ineffective diabetes self-care and poor diabetes control. *Diabetic Medicine*, 31(11), 1446-1451.

Promoting Acceptance in People with Diabetes



Tools and Techniques You Can Use

- Creative Hopelessness
- Mindfulness
- Cognitive and Emotional Defusion



Creative Hopelessness

Trying to 'control' difficult thoughts and feelings about diabetes can get in the way of diabetes management and living life

- Ask what the person has been doing to 'control' their diabetes-related thoughts and emotions
- Assess how this 'control' has been working and how it has not been working
- Suggest that 'control' may not be the most effective strategy and that there might be another way

Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.



Mindfulness

Paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgementally

- Mindfulness is the opposite of avoidance
- There are several types of mindfulness including physical, cognitive and emotional
- A primary goal of mindfulness is for the person to be an observer of their own experiences
- Mindfulness can increase capacity for distress tolerance

Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.



Cognitive & Emotional Defusion

Taking a step back and seeing thoughts and emotions for what they are, nothing more and nothing less.

- In a state of fusion, thoughts and emotions can seem like the absolute truth that drives behavior without choice
- In a state of defusion, the person has the ability to choose their behavior rather than having their thought/emotion choose it for them
- Encourage people to use the phrase 'I'm having the thought/feeling that ...'

Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.



Polling Question

In a study conducted in 2007, patients who completed a mindfulness-based intervention had an average A1c reduction of:

- A. .23%
- B. .48%
- C. .86%
- D. 1.8%

Rosenzweig, S., Reibel, D. K., Greeson, J. M., & Edman, J. S. (2007). Mindfulness-based stress reduction is associated with improved glycemic control in type 2 diabetes mellitus: a pilot study. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 13(5), 36.



Key Takeaways

- Acceptance is a skill that can be learned and needs to be practiced
- There are techniques you can teach your patients that can help
- These techniques are experiential – you can teach them better if you use them in your own life!

An Update on Alana

- Alana has come to realize that just because she has a thought or an impulse to avoid, she does not necessarily have to 'buy' it
- She is working to accept that sometimes she is going to feel distress and there is not always a way to make it go away
- Alana is starting to understand that she values her health and can make choices to manage her diabetes



An Update on Craig

- Even though Craig has some significant health problems he has not let these problems define him
- He has been using his desire to get a kidney transplant as leverage to allow him to accept the challenges he is experiencing on his road to transplant
- Craig has started eating mindfully



An Update on Grant

- Grant has started taking insulin regularly and, for the most part, has stopped ignoring the fact he has diabetes
- Even though it was difficult, he told his new co-workers about diabetes and was pleasantly surprised by their reaction
- Grant still finds himself struggling with trying to control his negative emotions around diabetes



“Arriving someplace more desirable at some
future time is an illusion.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

A photograph of three female runners crossing a finish line. The runner in the center is a white woman with blonde hair, wearing a bright pink tank top and black shorts, with a race bib number 9284. She is smiling broadly and holding the hand of the runner to her right. The runner on the right is a Black woman with dark hair, wearing a pink tank top with blue and yellow accents and black shorts, with a race bib number 6204. She is also smiling and holding the hand of the central runner. A third runner, a woman of Asian descent, is visible in the background on the left, wearing a light pink tank top and grey shorts, with a race bib number 9140. A red ribbon finish line is stretched across the foreground. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and sunlight.

Questions?

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