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Psychological impact of body Image in the use of diabetes technologies: challenges and Solutions

Technology is an invaluable tool that has revolutionized diabetes management. However, its use can also generate a range of emotions and emotional challenges. Body image is an important aspect for anyone, and for those living with diabetes, the challenges can be unique due to the use of technological devices.

In this article, we explore how people with diabetes feel when using these devices, the common questions that arise, and their emotional impact. Below are some factors that influence body image in people with diabetes.

WHAT SHOULD WE TAKE INTO ACCOUNT?

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the value and perception we have of ourselves—how we see, feel, and assess ourselves in terms of our abilities and achievements. It directly influences our emotions, decisions, and relationships with others.

The concept of self-esteem has been explored by various psychologists over time. One of the first to study it was William James, who, in 1890, in his *Principles of Psychology*, proposed that self-esteem results from dividing a person's successes by their aspirations.

It can be categorized into levels:

- **High self-esteem:** feelings of confidence, self-respect, and security.
- **Low self-esteem:** insecurity, self-criticism, and difficulty recognizing self-worth.
- **Balanced self-esteem:** realistic self-acceptance, neither overvalued nor underestimated.

Therefore, a person with balanced self-esteem will accept themselves and find it easier to incorporate electronic devices into their life.

People with lower self-esteem often feel more insecure about handling devices. One proposed intervention is to seek help from mental health professionals to develop personalized tools to strengthen self-esteem. Once self-esteem is balanced, the person will decide whether to accept or reject the device based on their goals rather than insecurity about using it.

Self-Concept

Having a positive self-concept can foster self-esteem, while a negative self-concept can influence how we feel and act.

Main components of self-concept:

1. **Physical:** how we perceive our body and appearance.
2. **Cognitive:** our perception of our intellectual abilities.
3. **Social:** how we relate to others and what role we assume in social interactions.
4. **Emotional:** how we value our emotions and our ability to manage them.
5. **Moral:** the beliefs and values that guide our decisions and actions.

Cultivating a positive self-concept in relation to diabetes means accepting diabetes as a part of life and focusing on strengths and possibilities rather than limitations.

Self-Image



PHOTO: Own source

It refers to how a person perceives their physical appearance, abilities, and personal characteristics. In the case of diabetes, this perception can be influenced by the daily management of the disease and the use of visible medical devices, such as insulin pumps or continuous glucose monitors. Using devices or depending on constant treatment can make some people feel different or fragile. Working on self-image involves strengthening the way a person perceives themselves, focusing on a positive and realistic self-per-»

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» ception. “Challenge negative thoughts about yourself and replace them with more constructive affirmations. Speaking to yourself kindly will help you distance yourself from negative thoughts.”

FACTORS AFFECTING BODY IMAGE

Visibility of Devices

Having a constant device on the body can affect self-esteem and self-image. One common concern is where to place the device. People often ask: What size is it? Where on the body is it most comfortable? Where is it most practical? Where is it least visible? Currently, tech-

nological innovations are making devices more discreet and easier to use—smaller insulin pumps and less visible sensors. These changes reduce negative impacts on self-esteem and improve personal acceptance of these devices. This can help people feel less self-conscious when interacting with others.

Intervention proposals: Talk openly with close ones about the device’s purpose. Wear clothes that make you feel comfortable. Remind yourself that these devices are important health tools. A helpful strategy may be to make a list of the tangible and intangible benefits experienced from using the device. This

can help patients refocus on the positive aspects.

Social Stigma

It’s important to remember that a person’s value is not defined by a disease or condition. Surrounding yourself with understanding people can remind you that you deserve respect and acceptance just as you are. Public perception of chronic illnesses and lack of awareness about diabetes can generate feelings of shame or isolation.

Intervention proposals: Practice positive, empowering responses to feel more »

» prepared to handle negative comments. Seek support from a trusted person—a friend, family member, or a support group of people who've had similar experiences. Diabetes associations aim to raise awareness and sensitize society to increase understanding of the reality of diabetes.

Feeling of Dependence

Depending on a health device can bring mixed emotions: On one hand, gratitude for having technology that improves quality of life; on the other, feelings of vulnerability or concern over dependence. Both are completely valid.

Intervention proposals: Listen to the person's emotions without criticism or judgment. Do not minimize these feelings. Downplaying them can increase feelings of dependence. Guide the conversation toward acceptance of their emotions and offer psychological support to help focus on building self-concept and self-esteem. Empower the individual regarding their illness, regardless of whether they use electronic devices or not.

HOW TO RESPOND IF A PATIENT DOESN'T WANT TO USE A DEVICE FOR THEIR HEALTH?

When emotions are not validated—either by oneself or others—several negative emotional, mental, and relational effects can arise. It can lead to frustration and difficulty processing emotions. Feeling that one's emotions are not validated can impact self-image, making a person believe their feelings are not legitimate or valid. It may increase emotional tension, anxiety, or even lead to mental health issues. In an environment where emotions are not validated, people may feel misunderstood or disconnected, harming important relationships.

Validating Emotions

Means recognizing and accepting a person's feelings as valid—without judging or minimizing them. This is a crucial step in emotional development, as it helps people feel understood, safe, and respected.

Name the emotion: sadness, joy, anger, frustration, fear, etc.

Avoid judging whether the emotion is “good” or “bad.” Emotions are simply natural human reactions. It's okay to show how you feel without judgment. Validating one's own emotions strengthens the relationship with diabetes, increases self-esteem, and fosters healthier communication. **D**

CONCLUSIONS

Each person has the right to decide about their own body and treatment, as long as they are properly informed. Forcing a treatment can lead to distrust, resentment, or even rejection of medical care in the future.

Low self-concept in people with diabetes may be related to the perception of the disease as an emotional and physical burden. Studies show that patients with type 1 diabetes mellitus often experience lower self-concept compared to those with type 2 diabetes mellitus, due to the complexity of managing the disease and the dependency on devices like insulin pumps.

Moreover, factors such as social stigma, constant concern about hypoglycemia, and emotional stress related to the illness can negatively influence how individuals perceive themselves.

It is important to address this topic from a comprehensive perspective, offering psychological support and promoting personal acceptance.

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