

## FACT SHEET:

# When and how psychologists can support people with diabetes

Living with diabetes can sometimes feel like a burden. It can feel frustrating and stressful trying to do all that's needed to manage your diabetes. At times, you may feel anxious, low in mood, or worried. Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. If diabetes is affecting your well-being, it is important to know when and how to seek support. We are all better able to deal with our emotions when we have support.

## About this fact sheet

Most people with diabetes manage well most of the time. But it's OK to acknowledge if you are struggling. Many people benefit from specialist emotional support from a psychologist. This fact sheet is about when, why and how to access support from a psychologist.

If you would like tips for managing your emotional health, go to [ndss.com.au/resources](https://ndss.com.au/resources).

## Who provides emotional support?

If you are struggling, it can help to be aware of your feelings and to address problems early. There are a range of health professionals who can help.

“

It really helped me having someone who could provide an outside perspective and challenge my thinking. They helped me discover why I was thinking and behaving the way I was and then gave me ideas and tools to make changes for the better.”

Mary, person with type 1 diabetes

# When and how psychologists can support people with diabetes

## Health professionals who specialise in diabetes

Your general practitioner (GP), endocrinologist or diabetes educator are well placed to offer basic emotional support. Talk with them about how you've been feeling about your diabetes. Many people feel reassured once they've had this discussion with their health professional.

## Health professionals who specialise in emotional care

For further support, you may want to talk with a psychologist, mental health nurse, social worker or psychiatrist.

Psychologists, in particular, are trained to provide ongoing support to people with a focus on emotional health, motivation, self-confidence and relationships.

Psychologists can support people in making positive changes to their mood or wellbeing, and the way they think and feel about their diabetes.

## Some reasons for consulting a psychologist

- Feeling overwhelmed or fed up with managing diabetes (e.g., making dietary changes, monitoring, keeping your glucose levels in range)
- Avoiding diabetes self-care
- Ongoing low mood or anxiety
- Feeling dissatisfied with life in general
- Low self-confidence or self-worth
- Having problems with your eating
- Having problems with your relationships or your sex life
- Feeling lonely or isolated, or pulling away from social or recreational activities
- Going through a major life change or a stressful situation (e.g., parenthood, carer responsibilities, work stress, loss of a loved one)
- Living with a mental illness.

## How do I know if a psychologist is for me?

If you tick any of the boxes on this checklist, you may benefit from talking with a psychologist.

## What can I expect from a psychologist?

### Sessions with a psychologist are usually:

- face-to-face, but phone and online services are available
- about an hour long
- over several weeks, with many people seeing their psychologist several times.

### At the first session, the psychologist will:

- ask you to share how you have been feeling lately
- ask what is happening in your life.

You can talk about how diabetes is affecting you and what you would like to get out of the session(s). You can talk about anything, not just diabetes.

### During each session, the psychologist will:

- listen without judgement and respect your privacy
- help you to reflect on your thoughts and feelings
- suggest some strategies to bring about any changes, if that's what you want (Psychologists suggest strategies that are based on research evidence).

### Over time, support from a psychologist can help you to:

- feel a sense of relief by sharing your thoughts and feelings
- develop coping or relaxation strategies
- develop new habits and behaviours for managing your diabetes
- improve your confidence
- build stronger or better relationships.

## Common concerns

**Q: Do psychologists only see people with serious emotional health concerns?**

**A:** Psychologists support people with a variety of emotional health concerns. You don't need to have a serious mental illness to benefit from seeing a psychologist.

**Q: Do psychologists tell people what to do?**

**A:** No, psychologists work with you, on your terms. They'll ask you what your goals or values are and help you work towards these at your pace.

**Q: Doesn't talking about difficult emotions just make people feel worse?**

**A:** At first, talking about feelings can be difficult, but it can also be a relief. Over time, it can help you better understand your strengths and help you find solutions. On the other hand, bottling up emotions can make you feel worse in the long run.

**Q: Is seeing a psychologist sign of weakness?**

**A:** No, it's a sign of strength and courage. All aspects of your health are important. Seeking support means that you're being proactive in looking after your emotional and physical health.

**Q: I've seen a psychologist before and it didn't help, so what's the point?**

**A:** Psychologists vary in the ways in which they work. People and personalities also vary, so it is important to find a psychologist who is the right fit for you.

Don't let a previous negative experience discourage you from accessing the support you need.



## How much do psychologists cost?

Fees vary based on the setting and service:

**In private practice.** Psychologists set their fees based on industry or Medicare recommendations. You may be eligible to have your fees partially (or fully) subsidised. For example, you may be eligible for a:

- Medicare rebate, if you have a referral from a GP under a:
  - » Mental Health Care Plan (up to 10 one-to-one and 10 group sessions per calendar year)
  - » Chronic Disease Management plan (up to 5 sessions with allied health professionals (e.g., psychologists) per calendar year)
- Private health insurance rebate (check with your fund)
- Concessions provided by some psychologists according to people's financial situation.

**In community-based services.** Psychologists are able to provide no-cost or low-cost services, as they receive government funding. Contact your community health service, GP or council to find out what low-cost services exist in your local area.

## How do I arrange to see a psychologist?

You can contact a psychologist directly or you can be referred to one, usually by your GP. If you are eligible and want to access Medicare subsidies, then you would need a GP's referral letter.

The referral letter can be made out to a specific psychologist (or service) of your choice, or one that your GP recommends. Some people prefer to do their own research to find a local psychologist, who has specific expertise (e.g., in diabetes), or has a certain cultural or linguistic background.

## Funding for telehealth services

For people in **rural** areas, telehealth services are funded by Medicare.

For people in **metro** areas, telehealth services with psychologists are subsidised through Medicare for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Previously, I had tried to find a suitable person to talk to but was not satisfied either with their focus, their personality or approach... when I did see the right psychologist, she was a perfect fit.”

**Alex, person with type 1 diabetes**

## Finding a psychologist

Some psychologists have specialist knowledge of diabetes. You can find them by asking your diabetes health professionals for a recommendation or doing your own research:

- For a list of psychologists across Australia, go to [psychology.org.au/FaP](https://psychology.org.au/FaP). You can search based on location, interest (e.g., diabetes) and languages spoken.
- You could also search online for local psychologists with specific interests.

It will not always be possible to find a psychologist specialising in diabetes in your area. If this is the case, you could consider:

- Telephone or online support from a psychologist outside your local area.
- Seeing a psychologist in your area and providing them with information to help in your discussions about how diabetes is affecting you. Information about emotional wellbeing and diabetes can be downloaded from the [ndss.com.au](https://ndss.com.au).





### **More information and support**

**NDSS resources about diabetes, emotional health and peer support:**

- Go to [ndss.com.au/resources](https://www.ndss.com.au/resources).
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a diabetes health professional.

**Information about psychologists:**

- Go to [psychology.org.au/for-the-public](https://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public).

**Check if a psychologist is registered:**

- Go to [ahpra.gov.au](https://www.ahpra.gov.au).

**Information about getting support:**

- Go to [headtohealth.gov.au/service-providers](https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/service-providers) and [beyondblue.org.au/get-support/who-can-assist](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/who-can-assist).

### **Notes**

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## **The NDSS and you**

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

Developed in collaboration with The Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes, a partnership for better health between Diabetes Victoria and Deakin University.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice. If you have any concerns about your health, or further questions, you should contact your health professional.