BEAT THE BLUES: DIABETES AND SELF ESTEEM

Henry Lew, psychologist, delves into the issue of our health affects the way we feel about ourselves.

Managing your diabetes can be a rollercoaster ride. You heave a sigh of relief when your blood sugars are under control. But when your blood sugar does not improve much or becomes worse, it might affect your self esteem and produce a host of problems that could further subvert any of your attempts at improving your health situation.

You try your best to exercise, monitor your blood sugar, change your diet, take your medications regularly, and follow up your appointments with your doctors. Yet, for some reason or other, nothing seems to improve. Now, that can be really demoralising, and it could dampen your motivation to strive for better health and maintain good blood sugar levels.
OUT OF CONTROL
When things seem to spiral out of control, you may feel helpless, guilty, stressed out or angry. And you try to look for a reason for the “failure”. Whatever the reasons for the poor sugar levels, be it insufficient health behavioural change or a medical reason, you may start beating yourself up for not doing enough. Self doubt creeps in and you sink further into the doldrums.

Sooner or later, you begin to feel so deflated and frustrated that you start to give up on yourself and you may not want to continue to do much for our health, sabotaging all previous efforts.

In some instances, you may withdraw from others who can actually help you, because you feel that you do not deserve to be helped. Such isolation and detachment will likely cause your health to deteriorate.

Blood sugar control appears to be a double-edged sword. Research studies have shown that good glycaemic control is related to feelings of confidence while poor glycaemic control is related to feelings of guilt, distress and tendency to give up on maintaining blood sugars.

There is some research that disputes that self esteem does not cause good or bad glycaemic control or vice versa, but self esteem most certainly relates to glycaemic control. Hence, managing how we feel about ourselves may help to facilitate glycaemic control though it may not cause good or bad glycaemic control.

FEELING GOOD
Here are some things you can consider in order to make it a habit to feel good about yourself, not only for better mental well-being but to help fuel your efforts at maintaining your blood sugars:

1. YOU ARE NOT PERFECT
Recognise that we all make mistakes. Forgive yourself and try to differentiate your behaviours from yourself. When you make a mistake it is not that you are flawed, but just because your behaviours were not adequate. We are “human beings”; we are who we are, we are not “human doings”; what we do is not all of us.

2. POSITIVELY HAPPY
Stay connected and surround yourself with affirming people, people who recognise the gem in you and who give positive and constructive feedback to help you be sure of who you are, what you are good at and how you can improve yourself.

3. EGO BOOSTERS
Sure, we make mistakes and have regrets and can readily come up with a list of it. How about a list of your own strength and achievements. Coming up with a list of your strengths and achievements is not just to boost your ego, but it is also helpful to remind yourself of what you have achieved. It is to encourage you on the road to better health.

We have all received report cards when we were in school. So why stop giving ourselves report cards when we leave school or when we become adults?

Perhaps it may be because we were brought up to be humble and it is kind of strange to ourselves. But feeling good is never a bad thing. And, of course, the aim of doing so is not to make us proud, boastful and arrogant but simply to make us more confident and motivated to deal with the negative messages we might encounter along the way as we strive to improve our health or as we lead our lives.