

A Letter to Young Persons with Diabetes

Evelyn Boon, Principal Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry, Singapore General Hospital, pens a letter to those who face the challenges of coping with diabetes in the prime of their lives.

Youth is the time when most of us feel invincible, where anything is possible. We are poised to face the exciting challenges of becoming independent and responsible for our own choices and decisions.

Adolescence is also a very trying period marked with confusion, hope, angst and mood swings. Your hormones are raging and things are unpredictable and contradictory. You may feel your brightest and darkest moments all at once.

In addition to coping with one of the most trying times of your life, you face new challenges in coping with your diabetes. Regardless of how long you've had diabetes, you may experience resentment towards having to live with it. You may experience a lot of intense negative emotions towards your diabetes care regime, even if you had previously grown used to it.

You dislike being different from all your friends and eat whatever they eat and do whatever they do. There may be times when you just want to disregard all the self-care management to maintain your blood sugars. You dread being seen as not healthy and needing medications while for all your friends enjoy good health. Life seems so unfair and you often silently scream 'Why me?!

Have hope. You are not alone in this. Although your parents may have given you more responsibilities with your diabetes care, they will still be there for you. Diabetes is still a family matter. Talk to them about how you feel; your frustrations, anger, etc. Let them share your emotions. If necessary, you can seek help from a counsellor to help manage your emotions. It does make you appear weak. It takes a lot of courage to ask for help.

Learn. Arm yourself with knowledge. Don't get frustrated with trying to get normoglycaemia. That is one of the hardest challenges for anyone of any age. It is especially so for a teenager as there are other physical factors at play. Learn to focus on what works. Have a curious mind and investigate what works.

Assume responsibility. No one can control your blood sugars except yourself. It is not the doctor's nor your parent's job to do so. But you certainly do not need to do this on your own. Get help from them to achieve YOUR goals. They are there to support you and help you cope.

Don't be defined by diabetes. You are NOT defined by this condition. It does not determine who or what you are or who you want to be. Diabetes is only one aspect of you. It is NOT you. You can live a normal healthy life just like anyone else. There is just a small need to consider your safety, just like how we need to have helmets and knee guards in place when we learn to rollerblade.

So take heart. You are you, more than a diagnosis. And you are not alone in your journey and care.

Yours truly

Evelyn