Johnson & Johnson INSTITUTE
Acceptance and Diabetes: Helping patients integrate diabetes into their lives

Mark Heyman, PhD, CDE
Director, Center for Diabetes and Mental Health
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

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’

Acceptance & Action Questionnaire - 2

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

# 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>never true</td>
<td>very seldom true</td>
<td>seldom true</td>
<td>sometimes true</td>
<td>frequently true</td>
<td>almost always true</td>
<td>always true</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. It’s 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

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 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

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

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

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 …’

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%

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
Questions?