



Diabetes and Obesity: Stigma, Blame and Shame

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Abstract:

For many people, living with diabetes can be stigmatizing. Understanding social stigma and self-stigma and its potential to negatively impact diabetes management will be reviewed. Included in this examination is the common misconception that stigma might help motivate individuals with obesity to lose weight and improve their health. However, it generally has the opposite effect. The general public should be aware that blaming and shaming people with obesity is not an effective tool for promoting weight loss, and it may contribute to poor health. Negative attitudes toward obesity by healthcare professionals can also act as a barrier to successful diabetes self-management. When people feel shamed because of their weight, they are more likely to avoid exercise and consume more calories to cope with stress. Disparagement of others due to their weight and messages that perpetuate blame and shame, if internalized, can cause harm to the physical and mental health of individuals with obesity. People who report feeling stigmatized may have more feelings of psychological distress and a greater tendency to self-isolate. Stress from feeling blamed for diabetes can ultimately worsen someone's condition, as counter hormones (i.e. cortisol and adrenaline) when produced, may increase blood glucose if a person does not have enough insulin in their system to offset the additional hormones. The "diabetes blame game" is not appropriate and not helpful at all.

Biography:

I am a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Certified Diabetes Educator in Private Practice specializing in treating the emotional issues of patients with diabetes utilizing a cognitive-behavioral orientation. I provide individual, family, and/or group therapy sessions. I am the author/editor of MY SWEET LIFE: Successful Women with Dia-



betes and the editor of MY SWEET LIFE: Successful Men with Diabetes. Each chapter, written by a highly respected and successful woman/man with diabetes, shares their heartwarming stories leaving the reader to feel inspired and empowered to find balance in their personal, professional, and spiritual lives.

Publication of speakers:

1. Zimmet P, Alberti KG, Shaw J. Global and societal implications of the diabetes epidemic. *Nature* 2001;414:782–787
2. Muoio DM, Newgard CB. Mechanisms of disease: molecular and metabolic mechanisms of insulin resistance and beta-cell failure in type 2 diabetes. *Nat Rev Mol Cell Biol* 2008;9:193–205
3. Bluestone JA, Herold K, Eisenbarth G. Genetics, pathogenesis and clinical interventions in type 1 diabetes. *Nature* 2010;464:1293–1300
4. Brown L, Macintyre K, Trujillo L. Interventions to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma: what have we learned? *AIDS Educ Prev* 2003 Feb;15(3):49–69

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