

Diabetes is associated with anxiety symptoms

World Mental Health Day is 10 October 2017

10 October 2017: Research shows that moderate-to-severe anxiety symptoms, an indication of a potential anxiety disorder, affect one in five people with insulin-treated type 2 diabetes and one in six with type 1 diabetes or non-insulin treated type 2 diabetes.

Dr Adriana Ventura, Research Fellow at the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes (ACBRD) and registered psychologist, who conducted the study, says the prevalence of anxiety symptoms and disorders in people with diabetes is within the range of general population estimates. However, having anxiety and diabetes poses additional challenges.

“Living with diabetes can be difficult enough; managing healthy living, medications and monitoring, and fitting these into daily life. Experiencing anxiety as well adds to the burden, and can impact on both their diabetes outcomes and quality of life,” said Dr Ventura.

Detecting anxiety among people with diabetes can be difficult, as some of the symptoms share similar physical symptoms to hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels), e.g. rapid heart rate. The relationship between diabetes and anxiety disorders needs to be further explored. For some people, diabetes may be completely unrelated to their anxiety – they just coexist – while for others, it may be that living with diabetes leads to feelings of anxiety.

In response to the research, a resource from the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) highlights the impact of anxiety on diabetes management, and how to identify anxiety symptoms. The resource, which was developed by the ACBRD in collaboration with Diabetes Australia, is titled: ***Diabetes and emotional health: A handbook for health professionals supporting adults with type 1 or type 2 diabetes.***

Dr Christel Hendrieckx, Senior Research Fellow and a clinical psychologist with the ACBRD, said the ***Anxiety disorder*** chapter in the handbook provides health professionals with practical information and tools to help them identify and address concerns about elevated anxiety symptoms faced by people with diabetes.

“People with diabetes have very real psychological concerns about living with diabetes and these need to be addressed. People want opportunities to talk about the psychological impact of diabetes and then work with their health professional to develop strategies to overcome them. A first step related to anxiety is to explore whether the anxiety is caused by diabetes. One example is that people fear developing complications – this is the foremost concern of people with diabetes around the world. If the person has a general anxiety disorder, this is a distinct psychological problem requiring a different approach to managing the anxiety associated with living with diabetes.”

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“This new resource helps health professionals to offer psychological care to people with diabetes experiencing anxiety. It is a guide for health professionals to have conversations about anxiety during consultations and discuss effective strategies to reduce the burden,” Dr Hendrieckx added.

Electronic copies of the *Diabetes and Emotional Health* handbook and toolkit for health professionals are free and can be accessed here:

www.ndss.com.au/online-resources-for-health-professionals.

The Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes (ACBRD) is a partnership for better health between Diabetes Victoria and Deakin University.

The National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) is an initiative of the Australian Government administered with the assistance of Diabetes Australia.

Notes to editors:

- The handbook provides health professionals with strategies and tools to better recognise emotional problems and to work with people with diabetes to reduce the significant psychological burden that can be caused by diabetes.
- This handbook and factsheet were developed as part of the *NDSS Mental Health and Diabetes National Development Programme*. They were developed in collaboration with the ACBRD.
- The handbook has undergone evaluation, which involved interviews with health professionals (e.g. diabetes educators, GPs, nurses, dietitians, endocrinologists) and people with diabetes, who read and commented on draft copies of the handbook.
- Mental healthcare for people with diabetes is recognised as a priority area in the Australian National Diabetes Strategy 2016–2020 - see the report here: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/nds-2016-2020>
- Diabetes is a progressive and complex condition, which can result in serious health complications.
- In Australia, around 1.7 million people are living with diabetes and a further 299 develop diabetes every day.

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