

# Would you mind?

raise your voice against diabetes stigma  
by combatting misleading and offensive  
stigmas surrounding diabetes



Your trusted partner in diabetes care

**NATIONAL  
DIABETES  
WEEK** 11-17 JULY 2021



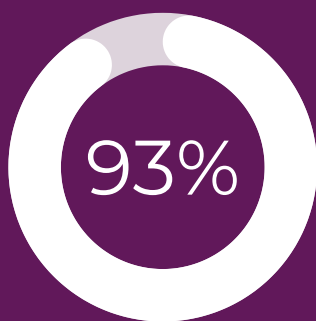
# BACKGROUND

Last year, ADEA and Diabetes Australia launched a new National Diabetes Week campaign focusing on mental health and diabetes. The campaign was a major success that both raised awareness of the mental health burden of living with diabetes and encouraged people with diabetes to talk about their mental health issues and receive support.

This year we would like to talk about one of the drivers of those psychological impacts – diabetes stigma.

Diabetes has some image problems. These problems are not exclusive to outside influences, they include people with diabetes feeling blamed for developing the condition, stigma around the use of insulin, feeling judged based on food consumption and a range of other issues.

There has been extensive research undertaken in this space that we have drawn on for this campaign.



of people with  
diabetes 1 believe  
type 1 diabetes is a  
stigmatized condition



of people with type 1  
diabetes report having  
experienced stigma



of people with type 2 diabetes believe there is stigma surrounding type  
2 diabetes

Browne, J., Ventura, A., Mosely, K. and Speight, J. (2014). 'I'm not a druggie, I'm just a diabetic': a qualitative study of stigma from the perspective of adults with type 1 diabetes. *BMJ Open*, 4(7), pp.e005625-e005625.  
Browne, J., Ventura, A., Mosely, K. and Speight, J. (2013). 'I call it the blame and shame disease': a qualitative study about perceptions of social stigma surrounding type 2 diabetes. *BMJ Open*, 3(11), p.e003384.



## CONSEQUENCES

- Stigma is a barrier to optimal self-care
- Feelings of judgement and shame can lead to depression, anxiety and other psychological impacts
- attempts to hide the condition can lead to improper management of diabetes (i.e., delaying or skipping insulin injections)

Browne, J., Scibilia, R. and Speight, J. (2013). The needs, concerns, and characteristics of younger Australian adults with Type 2 diabetes. *Diabetic Medicine*, 30(5), pp.620-626.

## UNDERSTANDING STIGMA

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

**What is diabetes-related stigma?**

**How does stigma impact the person with diabetes?**

**Consider the impact for different, ages, stages, and types.**

**What are the key drivers of stigma for people with diabetes?**

**Why should the broader community care about diabetes-related stigma?**

“

Following is a collection of statements made to people with diabetes either from people they may know or their doctor. The final collection are statements CDEs hear on a regular basis from their clients.

The spoken word is very powerful and can derail progress a person with diabetes has made in the management and care of their condition.

”

**Please be thoughtful &  
choose your words wisely.**




# Would you mind

if someone made this statement to a person with diabetes?

Should you really be eating this?  
I thought you have diabetes.  
You really should look after yourself  
better.

Answer with this

An illustration of a person with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, walking and shouting into a red and blue megaphone. The person is positioned on the left side of the image, facing right.

Having diabetes doesn't mean  
I can't eat a variety of different  
foods. Like everyone, I just need to  
make sure my lifestyle includes a  
healthy balanced diet and exercise.  
I am fortunate to have a  
supportive CDE and diabetes  
health team who help me with  
managing my diabetes.

# Would you mind

if someone made this statement to a person with diabetes?

your child has diabetes? you must have  
fed them too much sugar.

Try this reply

There are several different types of diabetes that occur for various reasons. Eating sugar does not cause diabetes. One major risk factor is a family history of diabetes, but there are many other risk factors such as ethnicity, age, high blood pressure, weight, being inactive, and even environmental factors, just to name a few.



# Would you mind

if someone made this statement to a person with diabetes?

How can you have diabetes? You're not fat like most diabetics.

Respond with

The word diabetic can be hurtful to many people and therefore is not used anymore. I am more than my diabetes and, like many others, would appreciate if you could use the term person/people with diabetes instead. Diabetes can develop in people of all shapes and sizes. There are many risk factors for developing diabetes, as outlined above.

# Would you mind

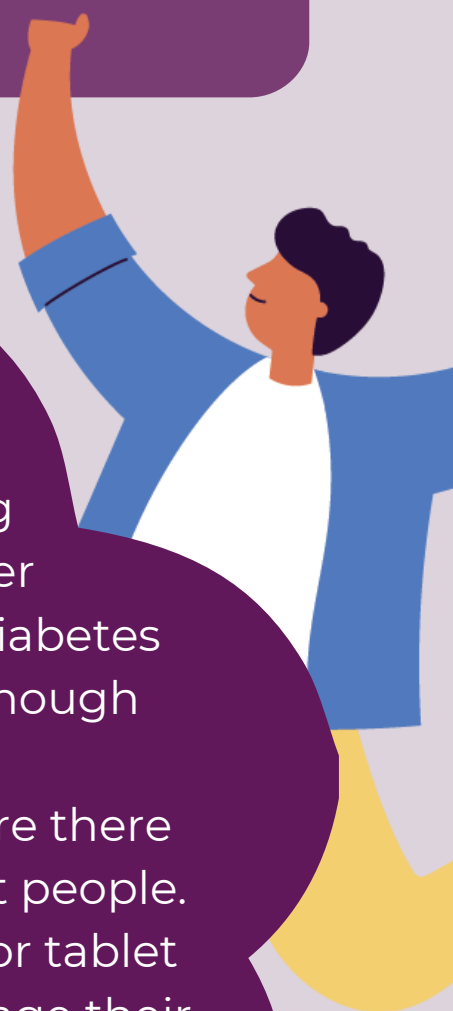
if someone made this statement to a person with diabetes?

You take insulin? You must have the bad kind of diabetes.

Try this reply

Insulin does not mean you have bad diabetes or that you are not managing your diabetes well. Insulin is just another type of medication that helps people with diabetes when their bodies are unable to produce enough insulin.

Diabetes is just like any other condition where there are a variety of medications that suit different people. Some people may be more suited to insulin or tablet medication while others may be able to manage their diabetes through diet and exercise. I see my CDE and diabetes health team regularly for my management and care.





# Would you mind

if a medical professional said this to their patient?

The bad news is that you've been diagnosed with diabetes. You really need to start by losing weight.

Try this instead

You've been diagnosed with diabetes, and I understand this might be a shock to you. However, looking at lifestyle changes including diet tweaks, weight management, physical activity levels can help manage this condition. I will also give you a referral to see a CDE who will help you navigate this news and support you with regular management of your diabetes.



# Would you mind

if a medical professional said this to their patient?

Why are you having problems managing your diabetes? Doesn't your pump do all of that for you?

## An alternative

Being on an insulin pump can have its challenges. For many, insulin pumps have revolutionised the way they manage their diabetes, but unfortunately it isn't a set-and-forget device. You still have to manage the use of your pump. Are there some parts of using your pump you need more help with? I can refer you to a local CDE who specialises in this.



# Would you mind

if a medical professional said this to their patient?

You haven't been compliant, so you will have to start on insulin.

Respond with

I understand you have been having a few problems managing your blood glucose levels. Your current treatment routine may need some adjusting to help you manage your blood glucose levels. Needing insulin is often a natural progression; insulin is another type of medication that will help you manage your diabetes. Let's have a chat about the difficulties you have been having. Please feel free to ask questions as we go along. I may refer you to a local CDE who has the expert knowledge to assist you with any questions you may have.

# Would you mind

if a medical professional said this to their patient?

Your child was diagnosed with diabetes because it runs in your family.

Answer with

Anyone can develop diabetes. Family history is just one risk factor.

# Would you mind

if someone with diabetes said this to their CDE?

I am feeling so guilty because I have been diagnosed with gestational diabetes. I know my diet and exercise could have been better.

Respond with

Gestational diabetes is not your fault. It can occur during pregnancy and many women are diagnosed with it. It is caused by hormones from the placenta interrupting the body's ability to manage blood glucose levels which can lead to insulin resistance.

If the body is unable to produce more insulin to cope with this demand, you experience higher blood glucose levels and gestational diabetes is diagnosed. In most cases, gestational diabetes goes away once the baby is born.



# Would you mind

if someone with diabetes said this to their CDE?

I don't like people seeing my pump site, I get embarrassed.

Answer with

It can be hard if you feel different to your peers and if they are unfamiliar with pumps. Would you like to talk about ways to explain what a pump does and why you need it? That way, you may feel more comfortable talking about it if someone asks you what it is.



# Would you mind

if someone with diabetes said this to their CDE?

I can't do that because I have diabetes.

Try this reply

New activities can be very exciting but also daunting to someone who has diabetes. I can support you to take on new activities. Would you like to have a chat and see if we can make a plan, so you can give that a go?

# Would you mind

if someone with diabetes said this to their CDE?

Don't worry about investing too much time/care in managing my dad's diabetes — he's old.

Respond with

It is true that sometimes management for those in older age brackets is different and often challenging.

Saying that, it is still important to support your dad to manage his diabetes. Some of the symptoms or side effects can really impact his quality of life – and yours, if you are his carer. I'd be happy to talk to you about some of the ways we can both help support your dad.





# Would you mind

if someone with diabetes said this to their CDE?

I'm afraid to tell my colleagues/schoolmates I have diabetes. They may treat me differently.

Try this

Anyone can develop diabetes. Diabetes can be challenging, but you are no different from any other person. It doesn't define you or prevent you from enjoying your life.

Sometimes it can help to give co-workers/schoolmates a simple explanation about what diabetes is. I can help you with that.

It's good to have their support in case you need their help at some point.

# Raise your voice

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