**Stigmas** are judgmental, negative, and unfair beliefs or labels given to a condition or someone with that condition. Stigma may be about people with diabetes, or diabetes-related behaviors. Stigma may come from loved ones and friends, people at work, health care providers, and/or the media. We may learn and even believe diabetes stigmas about ourselves, especially if we have experienced them for a long time. That’s a lot to carry.

**Diabetes stigma** may be associated with increased distress and depressive symptoms and decreased social support and quality of life. It can result in outcomes such as higher HbA1c results; more variability in BG levels; feelings of guilt, shame, blame, embarrassment, and isolation; and negative impacts on social life. One study found that women with diabetes reported experiencing higher levels of negative outcomes from diabetes stigmas than males.

**Common examples of diabetes stigmas:**

- Diabetes is caused by doing something wrong, or not doing the “right” thing
- Diabetes is a personal character flaw
- People with diabetes should be ashamed
- People with diabetes are a burden on the medical system and the economy.

**Shifting Diabetes Stigma**

- Reflect on how we describe ourselves and life with diabetes.
- What type of diabetes language do we prefer?
- Listen to others about the diabetes language they prefer, and why they choose those terms.
- Discuss our language preferences and choices with health care providers, family, friends, and coworkers.
- Find peer support, therapeutic communities, or counseling to address emotional impacts.
- Offer descriptive facts to balance people’s messages containing diabetes stigma.
- Join groups advocating for people with diabetes and other health conditions.
- Choose words that are neutral, descriptive, and based on facts.

**Remember:**

- Every type of diabetes is a complex, constantly changing, challenging condition.
- Women living with diabetes deserve respect and support.
- A diabetes diagnosis is not a personal failure.
- Living with diabetes takes strength, perseverance, and wisdom.
- Medical measurements (blood glucose, HbA1c, blood pressure, or weight) do not define our worth.
- We are not good or bad based on what the BG meter number or lab result says.
- We deserve nonjudgmental, collaborative medical care.

---

**Instead of** | **Consider/Offer**
---|---
Diabetic | Living with diabetes
Healthy Normal | Person without diabetes
Diabetic | Manage Diabetes Management
Testing | Checking Monitoring
Good BG/HbA1c | In-range BG/HbA1c
Bad BG/HbA1c | Low/lower High/higher
Good diabetic | Describe the activity
Bad diabetic | The good kind Diabetes Type of diabetes