

LANGUAGE & STIGMA

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.



#LanguageMatters

The words used to describe us and our diabetes are important to our physical, mental, and emotional health. Language that is positive, inclusive, empowering, respectful, and focuses on strengths helps reduce stigma.

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.

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.

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.

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 Bad diabetic	Describe the activity
The good kind	Diabetes Type of diabetes