

WOMEN AND DIABETES:
**UNDERSTANDING
DIFFERENCES
TO MAKE
A DIFFERENCE**

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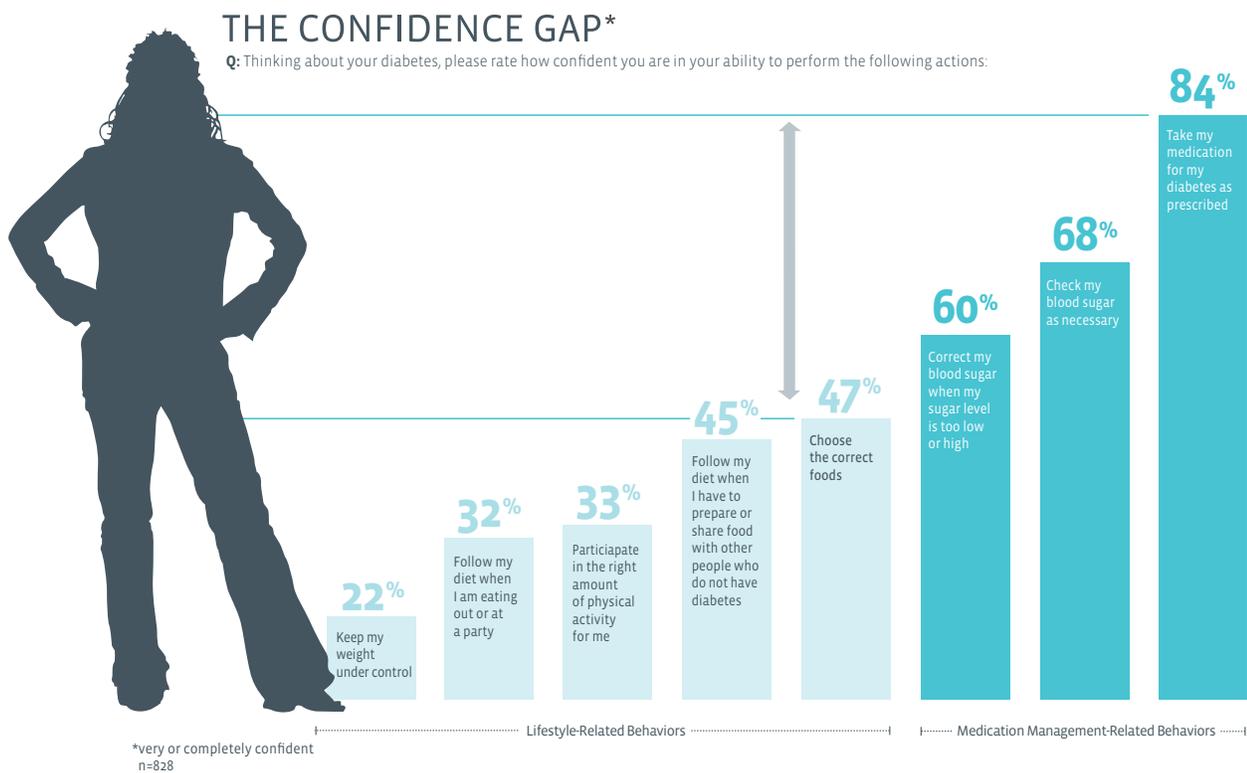
Diabetes isn't discriminatory. Instead, it's quite inclusive. Regardless of race, age, gender, ethnicity or any other demographic factor, no group is immune to this insidious disease. However, inspired by our relationship with DiabetesSisters (www.diabetessisters.org), we became interested in exploring the ways in which diabetes specifically impacts women. This is an issue that hasn't been extensively studied, so our research was meant to be a solid first step in this area.

After conducting a survey of 828 women with diabetes, we were surprised by findings regarding the way the disease is viewed and managed by female patients — particularly in regard to body image and sexual satisfaction. The results point to a variety of unmet needs that women must cope with on a daily basis — most commonly in the area of lifestyle modification.

For brands that serve the diabetes community or for anyone who has a vested interest in helping this population, the results of our survey represent a significant opportunity to make a connection with and provide value to women living with this condition. The study led us to the conclusion that women with diabetes lack effective support systems designed to address the specific issues they face. One of the most effective ways to help these patients is by developing and implementing behaviorally-driven support programs that directly address the needs they have and that remain unanswered.

CLOSING THE CONFIDENCE GAP

As with most metabolic diseases, managing diabetes involves more than just taking medication or monitoring blood glucose levels. It also means making lifestyle changes — sometimes major ones. And these are the issues that women struggle with the most — even more so than medication management. Finding time to exercise, following their diet and keeping their weight under control are common challenges for both diabetic and non-diabetic women. However, for women with diabetes, addressing these lifestyle issues plays a key role in the effective management of their disease. And, while they might be very confident regarding medication management, there is a “confidence gap” that exists between addressing that aspect of diabetes versus implementing necessary lifestyle changes.



In addition to the survey results that pointed to issues women with diabetes have regarding diet and exercise, they also provided surprising insight into how women’s feelings about the disease permeate many other aspects of their lives.

Some of these key findings included the following:

- Approximately one-third of respondents felt diabetes adversely impacted their desire for sex
- 38% of respondents said that their body image had been negatively impacted by diabetes
- 28% of respondents indicated their general happiness had been negatively impacted by diabetes

BUILDING THE CONFIDENCE TO LIVE WELL

Having knowledge is one thing. But confidence is the link between knowing what to do and actually doing it. Confidence plays a significant role in the successful management of diabetes. Women who feel confident in their ability to manage diabetes are less likely to blame themselves for having the disease, are less likely to worry about themselves and are less likely to hide their condition from others. Additionally, they are more likely to experience a more satisfying sex life.

Confidence is not something that's necessarily innate. It requires education, practice and support. While 84% of survey respondents said they feel confident in their ability to take their diabetes medication as prescribed, less than half indicated they had a level of certainty regarding the holistic management of their condition. This presents a significant opportunity for brands to make a difference in the lives of women with diabetes. By developing efforts that focus on building women's confidence from a holistic perspective, brands can transform the way women manage their disease — helping them enjoy a more satisfying and healthier life.

When it comes to developing patient education efforts, behavioral science provides a foundation upon which a clear roadmap can be drawn to improving confidence. Four core behavioral strategies can be used to incorporate elements that build skills and confidence. They are:

- Involving patients in their own care
- Using goal-setting techniques
- Engaging patients in active learning for skill building
- Exploring feelings and developing coping skills



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INVOLVE PATIENTS IN THEIR OWN CARE



When they're first diagnosed with diabetes, patients have an enormous amount of information to absorb. One of the most effective ways to ensure that they don't become overwhelmed; that they have a vested interest in making the necessary changes and that they have a clear idea regarding what they need to do to enhance their QOL is to give them a choice. They should be able to choose which issues surrounding medication management and lifestyle modification are most important to them. This is particularly true for women, who are often inundated not only by their own needs — but by those of the ones they care for. Allowing women to select the issues that are most important to them allows them to focus their energy on those specific items — garnering more effective results.

Some relevant elements to incorporate into a support program include the following:

- Create motivational interviewing tools that HCPs can use to uncover what changes their female diabetes patients want to make and to find out what will stand in their way of making those changes.
- Develop strategies to help women with diabetes succeed in situations that might otherwise represent a barrier to their success. For example, identifying 2-3 things on any menu that will be better choices when eating out.

USE GOAL SETTING TECHNIQUES



Managing the many facets of diabetes can be incredibly overwhelming. For women who have so many competing demands in their lives, goal setting can help them narrow their focus — setting them up for a greater chance of success. Additionally, research shows when HCPs and patients are aligned in regard to overall treatment goals and the specific strategies necessary to achieve them, confidence and clinical outcomes improve. When incorporating this element into a program, keep the following in mind:

- Help patients create action plans that break larger goals down into smaller milestones
- Be sure that the goals are realistic
- Provide self-monitoring tools so that patients can “see” their steps, progress and successes
- Include short-term goals which can be achieved and celebrated more immediately — encouraging and reinforcing positive behavior

ENGAGE PATIENTS IN ACTIVE LEARNING FOR SKILL BUILDING



Women are often emotion-focused copers rather than problem-focused copers. As a result, those women who have diabetes might lack the necessary skills to be as proficient as they need to be in successfully managing the real world diabetes-related issues that arise. By using an active learning approach within a support program, patients remain more engaged and skill building is enhanced. Ways to do this include the following:

- Incorporate experiential approaches to relay practical, problem-solving techniques. This can be accomplished through tactics such as podcasts, videos, “what-if” scenarios, and interactive quizzes.
- Provide opportunities for patient group discussions and/or interaction during which patients can hear from their peers about lessons learned from successes and failures. This can be done live or virtually.
- Help women establish connections with mentors or buddies who can share their personal experiences with managing all aspects of diabetes. This can be accomplished in either live or virtual settings. The latter might include tactics such as novellas or videos.

EXPLORING FEELINGS AND DEVELOPING COPING SKILLS



Stress, anxiety and depression can stand in the way of improving confidence. So, while it’s important to employ skill-building strategies like those we’ve recommended, it’s just as important to provide outlets for emotional expression and support. Doing so can help women understand the source of their emotions and give them healthier coping strategies. Ways of doing this include the following:

- Help women become self-aware in terms of how they feel about their diabetes and the impact it has on their lives
- Invite women to express their personal story of diabetes through written or other forms of creative expression — including non-verbal formats such as photography and painting
- Establish virtual support groups and provide a discussion guide focusing on support/coping topics
- Use patients, diabetes educators or counselors to demonstrate/role play examples of coping strategies that will minimize stress, anxiety and negative thinking. This can be done through novellas, videos, podcasts, webinars and other tactics.

WOMEN WITH DIABETES: LIVING STRONG AND LIVING WELL

Our relationship with DiabetesSisters has given us the opportunity to see how well women can live with diabetes. Because of the support network of that organization and the educational resources it provides, the women we've encountered are happy, vibrant, strong and — most certainly — confident. Despite all of the demands they have in their lives, they've found ways to make managing their diabetes and creating good lives for themselves among their top priorities.

Behaviorally based patient support efforts can have a similar impact on the lives of women with diabetes. When developed with an appreciation of the unique struggles these women face in managing their disease, patient programs can provide the support, education and tools necessary for building the confidence required to make desired lifestyle modifications. Ultimately, it's all about understanding the differences these women struggle with in order to make a difference that truly matters.

Andi Kravitz Weiss, MPH, Behaviorist

With her background in behavioral science and focus on improving patient outcomes, Andi specializes in developing practical ways to motivate people to make healthy, sustainable lifestyle changes. Since 2009 Andi has helped DiabetesSisters identify ways to further engage its audience and become recognized as the premier organization for women living with diabetes. She currently serves on the organization's Advisory Council. Prior to joining MicroMass, Andi worked in physical activity and aging at Be Active North Carolina, concentrating on falls prevention. That experience helped to lay the groundwork for bringing "A Matter of Balance" — a nationally recognized exercise program designed to help older adults manage concerns about falling and improve physical strength — to North Carolina. Andi has a Master of Public Health in health behavior and health education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Bachelor of Arts in communication from the University of Pennsylvania.

About MicroMass Communications, Inc.

Founded in 1994, MicroMass offers unrivalled capabilities in the application of behavioral science to marketing challenges. The company's approach is founded on the belief that understanding the critical factors that influence individual behavior is the best way to create dialogue and build enduring relationships between customers and brands.

Unlike traditional agencies that are structured by discipline, MicroMass brings together under one roof the expertise and services for building sophisticated, multi-channel programs that span the full marketing continuum.

Headquartered in Cary, N.C., MicroMass is one of the fastest growing agencies in its field. With experience in more than 30 therapeutic categories, the company has a roster of clients that includes some of the most respected names in the pharmaceutical industry.

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