



## Ginger Vieira Weighs In on the Mental Part

Mental health in diabetes is about resilience. We're all human. And a diabetes diagnosis doesn't change that. Everyone in life has challenges, and diabetes is one of our challenges. I've lived with type 1 diabetes for twenty-one years. For the past fifteen years, I've met and worked with hundreds of others with type 1, type 1.5, and type 2 diabetes, and they all have something in common: They're human, too.

Diabetes doesn't just add stress to our lives; our lives add stress to diabetes. This means that managing your mental health needs to include room for imperfections, for stepping back a little sometimes, for making "mistakes," for learning from "mistakes," and for improving your self-care gradually over years and years. *Over years and years*, rather than trying to become the "perfect" diabetic overnight.

This means that *resilience* is actually the most critical tool in your diabetes toolbox. Resilience is your ability to wake up every single morning and face your diabetes management duties again and again, regardless of how things went the day before.

Resilience is also about *protecting* your mental health because diabetes management comes with so much pressure, so many rules, so many warnings, so many tasks, and so many tests.

Some days, your *best effort* may look awesome on that glucose meter or in your choices around food, medications, and exercise. On other days, your *best effort* may look a little less awesome. Giving yourself room to be human—rather than beating yourself up for imperfections—is what will help you wake up the next day with renewed resilience and energy to face diabetes all over again.

What you know about your diabetes today versus what you'll know ten years from now will be vastly different if you view every high or low blood sugar as merely an opportunity to learn something new. Dust off. Try again. Rinse and repeat.

Resilience.

Diabetes management consumes a tremendous amount of our mental energy—even if you're thriving and have healthy routines in place. When something else in life happens—like a divorce, the death of a loved one, a sick family member, changes in your career, going to college, breaking up with your boyfriend or girlfriend, and so on—these things inevitably take energy away from diabetes management. And sometimes that's okay. (Of course, as long as you're still doing the basics to keep yourself out of the hospital!)

Your mental health is also affected by the rules and beliefs you develop around your physical health. It's been all-too-well established that diabetes and eating disorders go painfully hand-in-hand—that's because diabetes inevitably creates such a hyper-focus on food—and an endless list of lectures about what we can and cannot, should and should not, eat. “Bad” foods versus “good” foods. Beliefs that we are “bad diabetics” for eating “bad” foods.

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In my experience, most people with diabetes thrive when they protect their own mental health by giving themselves grace and flexibility and by finding out what works for them versus trying to adhere to what works for someone else.

While Chad and I may disagree on how people with diabetes “should” eat, our goal is the same: for you to thrive in life with diabetes.

But you are truly in charge of what happens next, and that actually comes down to determining what works best for you. Many readers may try a twelve-step perspective as Chad suggests to nutrition and thrive, while others may struggle immensely. This isn’t because you’re a failure or you lack discipline. It’s because there is no “one size fits all” to diabetes management or *life* in general.

Me? I thrive with the freedom to choose. There are no rules—there are simply decisions I make, and because I get to be in charge, I am empowered to make lots of really healthy choices, with room for less-than-perfect choices.

What works for you? What helps you feel empowered by your relationship with food and diabetes? What helps you feel empowered by your relationship with exercise? With your blood sugars? With your health care team?

The secret to thriving both mentally and physically isn’t about copying what someone else is doing, but rather taking the same steps they took in simply experimenting and determining what works best *for you*.

You picked up this book because you’re looking to improve your life with diabetes, and there’s no doubt that

this book will guide you in that process! If you find the twelve-step perspective approach to food to be too restrictive, that doesn't mean you're a failure.

As Bruce Lee once said, "Use only that which works and take it from any place you can find it."<sup>17</sup>

Use the ideas in this book to create your own sustainable approach to thriving with diabetes—thriving both physically and mentally, because you can't have one without the other.

And most of all: Give yourself some room to be imperfect. Don't beat yourself up when you trip and fall. Get up. Dust yourself off. Take a deep breath. And try again, perhaps with a few tweaks in your approach next time.

Experiment and develop an approach that you can successfully sustain. A strict low-carb approach might work for years and years, and then something in your life or your beliefs and knowledge about nutrition might change, and so your approach changes, too.

Chad may not know this, but I ate strictly low carb *for years*—and it worked well for me during that time of my life. But today, the strictness of how I used to eat doesn't feel like a healthy fit for me, mentally or physically. And guess what? My A1c isn't higher. My insulin needs are *lower*. And actually, I weigh *less*. It's not because there's one secret fix to diabetes; it's because my life and my beliefs about what balanced nutrition looks like for me at this time in my life have changed.

It's about *you* and the details in *your* life—the details that make up who you are, the challenges you face, the strengths you possess, and the things that bring you joy.

Chad has researched and describes approaches that work well for him, both mentally and physically.

And now it's your turn.

Don't forget to carry a handful of resilience with you wherever you go.

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Ginger Vieira has lived with type 1 diabetes and celiac disease since 1999 and fibromyalgia since 2014. She is the author of four books: *Pregnancy with Type 1 Diabetes*, *Dealing with Diabetes Burnout*, *Emotional Eating with Diabetes*, and *Your Diabetes Science Experiment*. Her background includes a BS in professional writing and certifications in coaching, personal training, and yoga. Ginger creates content regularly for diabetes websites, including *DiabetesMine*, *Healthline*, *Omnipod*, *Diabetes Strong*, *Diathrive*, *DiabetesSisters*, YouTube, Instagram, and many more. She helped develop the diabetes coaching program for *InquisitHealth* and speaks regularly at diabetes conferences, camps, and organizations. Once upon a time, Ginger set fourteen records in drug-free powerlifting, but just as she let go of intense nutrition rules, she stepped away from intense exercise, too. Today, Ginger lives in Vermont, where you'll find her writing, jumping rope, running around with her daughters, or walking with her handsome fella, Karl, and their dog, Petey.