DIABULIMIA and DIABETES

Virginia Porcello, PhD, LPC, CEDS
Solutions Program for Eating Disorders
&
Bethany Jagdharry, RN, BSN, CDE
Memorial Health University Hospital

WHAT IS DIABLIMIA?

- The term “diabulimia” began to surface in 2007 among the health and public communities.
- Diabulimia is an eating disorder in which people with type 1 diabetes deliberately give themselves less insulin than they need.
- Reducing or omitting insulin at least twice a week in a three month period is thought to diabulimia.
- There is still no official definition of how frequent and duration of insulin omission
- This is one of the criteria of bulimia nervosa per DSM IV
Negativity about Weight, Shape, and Body

Depression/Anxiety

Energy, Libido, Self-esteem, Concentration

Social Isolation/Limitability

High Blood Sugar

Guilt, Secrecy, Fear, Feelings of Helplessness

Decreased Diabetes Self-Care & Strategic Insulin Restriction

Energy, Sleep

SKIPPING OR REDUCING INSULIN DOSES decreases metabolic control

Hyperglycemia
Lipid Catabolism
Weight Loss
Diabetic Retinopathy
Dehydration
Electrolyte Imbalance
Ketosis
Kidney Failure
Muscle Fatigue
Blindness
Infections

INCREASED RISK OF DEATH

Who’s at Risk?

- Preteen and teenage girls who are generally preoccupied with their appearance
- Those with type 1 diabetes are even more so and, therefore, have a greater risk of developing diabulimia
- The American Diabetes Association (ADA) states that women with diabetes are nearly three times more likely to develop an eating disorder than women without diabetes.

Prevalence of Diabulimia

- Studies have shown that up to 30% of adolescents with type 1 diabetes skip or restrict insulin to lose weight.
- These individuals tend to have poorly controlled diabetes, with a higher risk of developing microvascular and macro vascular complications, such as heart disease, stroke, neuropathy, retinopathy, and nephropathy.
- They have three times the mortality risk compared with those who don’t restrict insulin and are estimated to have a 13-year-shorter life expectancy.
- The practice of withholding insulin has been seen in girls as young as 13 and in women as old as 60.2
Health Consequences

- No matter the age, diabulimia can have devastating and permanent effects on the body.

- Short-term consequences include dehydration, frequent urination and glucosuria, insatiable thirst, increased appetite, high blood glucose levels, fatigue, decreased concentration, electrolyte imbalance, and weight loss.

- Long-term consequences include heart attack, stroke, retinopathy, nephropathy, neuropathy, gastro paresis, vascular disease, gum disease, and infertility.

- There’s also the possibility of death.

Signs and Symptoms of Diabulimia

- Hyperglycemia
- A hemoglobin A1c value much higher than would be expected, given recorded blood glucose values
- Changes in eating habits (eating more but still losing weight)
- Dramatic shifts in weight
- Low energy
- Unusual food patterns
- Bingeing on carbohydrates and sweets
- Obsession with food and body image
- Anxiety about weight or avoidance of being weighed
- Delay in puberty or sexual maturation
- Irregular or no menses
Signs and Symptoms of Diabulimia Cont

- Severe family stress
- Frequent hospitalizations for diabetic ketoacidosis
- Preoccupation with label reading beyond typical diabetes care
- Excessive exercise
- Hiding food
- Smell of ketones on the breath and in urine
- Frequent urination (e.g., using the restroom during a counseling session)
- Physical signs of malnutrition (e.g., hair loss, dry skin)

Treatment for Diabulimia

Common psychological Treatments

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**: Emphasizes the thinking, and the actions of reintroducing of regular eating, weight concerns and treating body image concerns.

- **Dialectic Behavior Therapy (DBT)**: is a treatment that combines CBT and emotional regulation. It is often done in a group setting.

- **Family-Based Therapy (FBT)**: enlists the family as a resource to help their child through behavioral management of symptoms. Can be especially helpful treatment for children and adolescents with diabulimia.
Understanding Diabetes

- Insulin: The role insulin plays in the body is an important and complex one.

- Carbohydrates are used as energy once insulin opens the cell door.

- Without insulin, there is no energy. Therefore, the body finds new, creative ways to survive.

Controlling Diabetes

- Tight diabetes control requires constant monitoring, planning, and scheduling.

- A day in the life of a person with diabetes is not easy.

- Things to consider when managing diabetes successfully: stress, activity, illness, excitement, schedules, alcohol, meals, snacks, low supplies, insulin injections, pump site changes, pattern management, etc.
Diabetes and Depression

Q & A