



PEER PARTNERS FOR DIABETES CARE

By Martha Funnell, MS, RN, CDE

As you know, your health care team can do a lot to help you manage your diabetes. But research shows working with others who have diabetes, or your peers, also can help with your self-care efforts.

A peer is a person who is similar to you. Although peers may have other things in common with you, peer programs for diabetes usually are led by someone who has diabetes or has lived with someone with diabetes; for example, as a spouse or parent.

BENEFITS OF PEERS

There are a variety of programs led by peers with diabetes. Those programs help people with diabetes feel more confident in their ability to care for their diabetes and improve their health. They work because it is helpful to hear from other people who share your problems and concerns and have done well with them. The support of peers can help you reach your goals and can be a source of practical ideas for ways to cope with diabetes.

FINDING PEERS

A good place to start is with your health care team. Your diabetes educator, pharmacist or health care provider may know of peer programs in your area. You also can go online to check out programs in your area or locate Internet-based groups.

There are programs just for people with diabetes and some that are meant for people with different chronic diseases. Some are free, while others charge a small fee.

Leaders may have diabetes themselves and have training in leading a group. They also may be community health workers or lay health workers

The support of peers can help you reach your goals and can be a source of practical ideas for ways to cope with diabetes.

who have been trained about diabetes and group leadership but may not have diabetes. Some peer programs offer group sessions, while others team up pairs of people with diabetes who work with each other. Meeting with a partner gives you the chance to receive and give support.

Once you find a peer program, find out if this program will meet your needs by asking the questions listed on the side of the page.

BECOMING A PEER LEADER

If there are no peer programs in your area, you may want to consider becoming a peer leader. Once again, your health care team is a good place to start. Ask if they know of others with diabetes who would like to take part in this type of program or if they know of training programs you could take. The training will give you skills you can use in other areas of your life and also may help you better care for yourself.

Even if you are not able to find a peer program, let your health care team know you are willing to partner with someone else who has diabetes. If you go to a support group led by a health professional, ask others in the group if they would like to talk about diabetes outside of the group, or ask the leader to bring it up to the entire group. Those who are interested can sign up to be a peer.

It helps to talk with someone who has the same problems as you. A peer can help you better understand and cope with your own struggles or concerns. Once you connect with a peer, you can benefit and help someone else on his or her diabetes journey.

8

questions to ask about a peer program

1

What is the main purpose of the group?

2

Who are the people who will attend?

3

Are family members invited?

4

Is education about the clinical care of diabetes included?

5

What training does the peer leader have?

6

Are health professionals involved in the sessions?

7

What is expected of group members?

8

Is the group free or is there a fee?