

## EATING DISORDERS AND DIABETES

### *Intentional Insulin Restriction for Weight Loss:*

An eating disorder in which a person with insulin dependent diabetes intentionally misses or reduces insulin in order to lose weight. Skipping insulin is a dangerous issue for people with diabetes, especially type 1 diabetes, as insulin is necessary for life. If insulin is skipped or restricted, then the person with diabetes may suffer from very serious health issues, and in some cases, death. This disorder is most commonly seen among adolescent and young adult females with type 1 diabetes, but can occur in males and females of all ages. This is due to much closer attention to food portions, weight, exercise, and glucose monitoring in addition to poor body image and self-esteem. Avoid using the term 'diabulimia' as it trivializes 2 serious conditions: diabetes and bulimia.

### *Signs and Symptoms:*

- Constant urination
- Constant thirst
- Excessive appetite
- Repeated episodes of DKA
- Unexplained elevation in HbA1c
- Weakness
- Fatigue
- Large amounts of glucose in urine
- Frequent ketones in urine or blood
- Severe weight loss
- Protein in urine
- Dehydration
- Swelling
- Missed menstrual cycles

### *Long-Term Problems Associated with Insulin Restriction:*

- Kidney damage (nephropathy)
- Nerve damage to hands and feet (neuropathy)
- Eye damage (retinopathy)
- Heart problems
- Osteoporosis
- Death

*Treatment:*

Like other eating disorders, it is important to have the proper support team, including a psychologist, registered dietitian, certified diabetes educator, and endocrinologist. Family and social support is another important factor. For more resources on what to do if you feel a loved one is experiencing these symptoms see the following:

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/diabulimia-5>

<http://www.diabulimiahelpline.org>

[Goebel-Fabbri A. Detecting and treating eating disorders in youth women with Type 1 diabetes. In Anderson, B & Rubin RR \(Eds.\) Practical Psychology for Diabetes Clinicians, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. American Diabetes Association, 2002; 239-247.](#)