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Buckle up—we’re getting metaphorical about tech
How metaphors can help supplement diabetes education for patients.

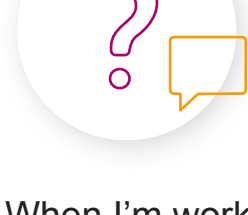
Tech metaphors: How analogies can help boost patient understanding of diabetes tech

Tech-up Perspectives | Issue 7

Welcome to another Diabetes Tech-up™ monthly newsletter! In this issue, Diabetes Tech-up™ podcast cohost Dr Alicia Shelly shares insight into the power of analogy to educate patients about diabetes and tech.

You can also check out

- A [new Diabetes Tech-up™ podcast episode](#) that considers tech use from a patient’s point of view.
- A [new article](#) from diabetes educator Amy Hess-Fischl about working with people at different levels of health literacy.



Dr Shelly, how can health care professionals leverage analogies to explain the benefits of diabetes tech to their patients?

When I’m working with someone who is trying to better understand how to manage their diabetes, I like to use metaphors to paint a clearer picture of how tech might be able to help them. By presenting aspects of diabetes management as more relatable subjects, I can open a door to conversations and questions that might have been closed before.

This idea falls under a novel approach called analogy-based comprehensive diabetes education (ABCDE).¹ There are several established analogies that follow this approach. Here’s my spin on 2 that I use all the time when I’m meeting with patients with diabetes.



The diabetes chair¹

You may want to sit down for this one: Effective diabetes management is a 4-legged chair. Each leg represents 1 of the pillars of health that I discuss with my patients.

- Diet
- Medication
- Physical activity
- Glucose management

If you remove 1 of these legs, the chair becomes unbalanced. Take away 2 and the whole thing will fall over.

It’s my role to make sure people know how they can keep their seat sturdy. I like asking my patients if they think 1 leg is wobblier than the others, and that gives them an opportunity to open up about challenges in their self-management routine.

Each leg also has 1 or more pieces of tech that I can recommend to stabilize it. With glucose management, that usually starts a conversation about continuous glucose monitors (CGMs), and I like to pivot to the next analogy for that discussion.



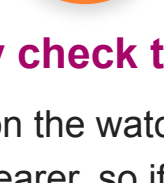
Glucose speed limits¹

Managing glucose levels is not unlike staying within the speed limit while driving. When we know the speed limit, we just have to watch the speedometer to stay out of trouble.

Now what if your car had a speedometer that required you to pull over every time you wanted to know how fast you were going? That would be like a person who checks their blood glucose with a blood glucose meter (BGM).

By contrast, a CGM is more like an actual speedometer. You can quickly check how fast you’re going (what your glucose levels are) and make an adjustment to match the speed limit (stay within your target range).

This comparison has helped a number of my patients understand the importance of checking their blood glucose levels throughout the day. For those who are still using a BGM, this analogy contextualizes why they need to go through the process of checking, and it can also open their eyes to the benefits of a CGM.



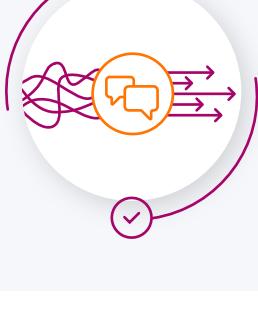
Reality check to reset

When I’m with a patient, I’m always on the watch for signs of confusion. My goal for using metaphors is to make things clearer, so if my read is that the person I’m talking to isn’t getting it, that’s my cue to pivot to a different approach.

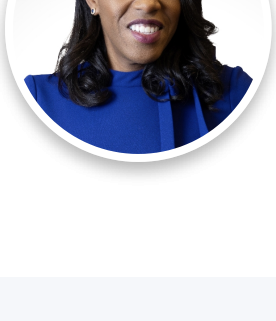
There are multiple reasons a metaphor might not land or be appropriate. I know some people who prefer to keep things literal—they understand what we’re talking about and want to get straight to the actionable details.

I’ve also met with people who become emotional, such as when they’re first diagnosed, and those are situations where I recognize that someone might not be hearing everything I say. It’s better for me to instead take a step back and focus on listening to them.

I think it’s also important to keep in mind that analogies are sometimes born from generalizations, which can introduce biases. Familiarizing yourself with analogies like the ones outlined under ABCDE can help you feel prepared to talk to patients while avoiding stereotypes.¹



Key takeaway
A good analogy can clarify points of confusion and move the conversation about your patient’s diabetes management forward.¹ Try one of the examples above the next time you want to discuss the benefits of diabetes tech with a patient.



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Dr Shelly is a primary care provider who regularly sees patients with diabetes. She is a board-certified internal medicine physician at Wellstar Primary Care in Douglasville, GA. Dr Shelly received a fee from Novo Nordisk for her participation.

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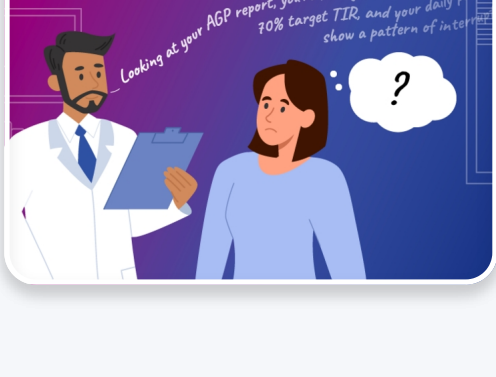


PODCAST
Ep 11: Walk a mile in my CGM

Our cohosts discuss health literacy and explore the experience of using diabetes tech from the patient perspective.

19 min listen

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ARTICLE
How to Explain Diabetes Tech to Anyone—Regardless of Their Health Literacy Level

Health literacy can have a profound impact on outcomes for people with diabetes. Here are some tips for getting a read on our patients and meeting them where they are.

Amy Hess-Fischl, MS, RDN, LDN, BC-ADM, CDCES
| 10 min read

[Read the article →](#)

Reference:

1. Sekhar RV. ‘Analogy-based comprehensive diabetes education’ (ABCDE) improves glycemic control of diabetic patients in an underserved population: results of a retrospective chart analysis. *Healthcare (Basel)*. 2022;10(3):409. doi:10.3390/healthcare10030409

The Mission of Diabetes Tech-up™

Diabetes Tech-up™ is sponsored by Novo Nordisk, a global leader in diabetes. We believe that adoption of innovative technologies can help appropriate patients better manage diabetes. Our goal is to provide information to help health care professionals on the front line of diabetes care strengthen their understanding of diabetes technologies and implement them where they can have the greatest impact.