Positive Affect as a Buffer Against Psychopathology in Diabetes Patients: A Randomised Controlled Trial

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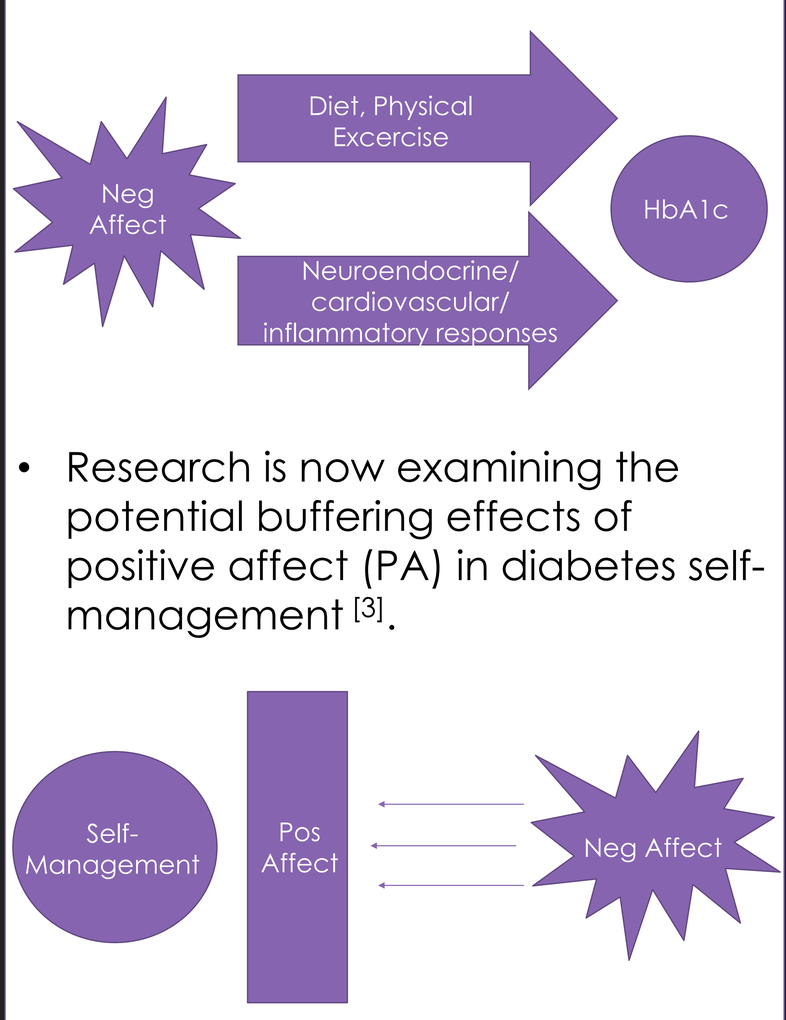
Aim

- The aim of this study was to assess a brief 'positive' psychological intervention's effectiveness in facilitating positive affect amongst people with diabetes.

Background

- Affective states are correlated with diabetes outcomes [1].

- Negative affective states such as depression are associated with poorer HbA1c results via behavioural and direct biological pathways [2].



- Research is now examining the potential buffering effects of positive affect (PA) in diabetes self-management [3].

- Early studies have shown PA can even predict lower levels of mortality amongst certain populations [4].

- As such, "positive" psychological interventions designed to facilitate PA are now being developed [5].

Methodology

- 33 people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes signed up to a four-week intervention study.

- The intervention was based on an existing protocol designed to help people express their emotions, set goals, and restructure their priorities.

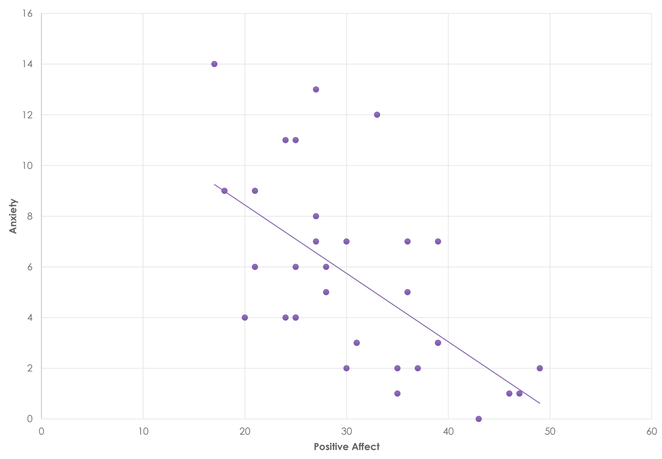
- At baseline, participants were randomised to either receive the intervention immediately or at the end of the of the study period.

- They then completed questionnaires that assessed the frequency of positive and negative affect as well as the existence of symptoms of anxiety and depression.

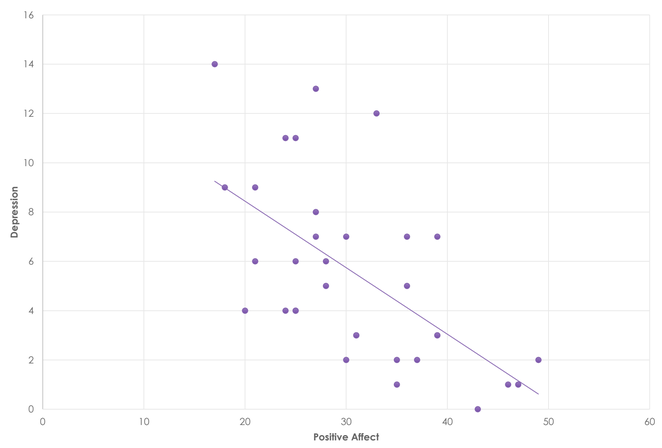
Results

- Analysis of this phase of the study revealed a significant link between experience of affect and psychopathology ($p < .05$).

- Though it is to be expected that more negative emotions would correlate with higher levels of anxiety and depression, the results also showed that participants who reported a higher frequency of positive emotions had significantly lower levels of anxiety ($r = -0.54$)…



- …and depression ($r = -0.63$).



- This implies a buffering effect.

Results (cont.)

- However, these associations were negated after controlling for time since diagnosis. Results showed that the longer a person had diabetes, the more frequently they would experience positive emotions.

Discussion

- Positive emotions were shown to buffer against anxiety and depression in people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

- This supports findings from similar positive intervention trials [5].

- As people appear to better adapt over time, this study also uniquely suggests that the newly diagnosed may benefit most from positive interventions.

- The study's final results will reveal more about the link between positive affect and diabetes self-management.

Conclusions

- Positive affect plays an important role in combating co-morbid mental illness.

- Considering the negative influences of depression and anxiety on self-management, future treatments/therapies may do well to consider the benefits of facilitating positive affect.

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