

# Living in COVID Times - IDF Europe COVID & Diabetes Survey

## Experiences from People living with Diabetes



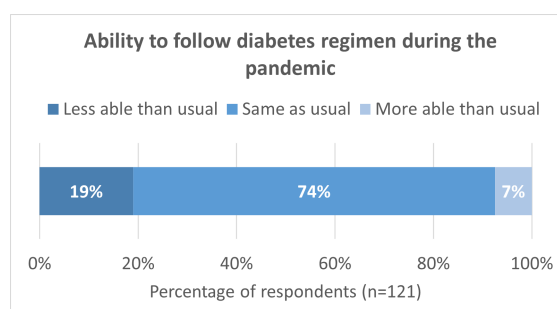
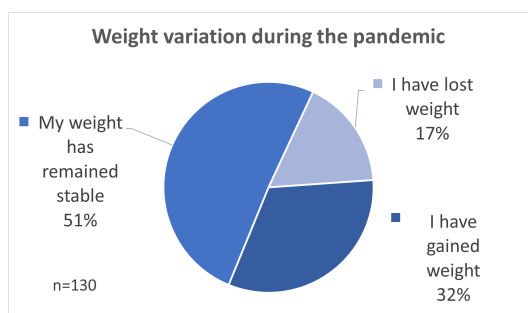
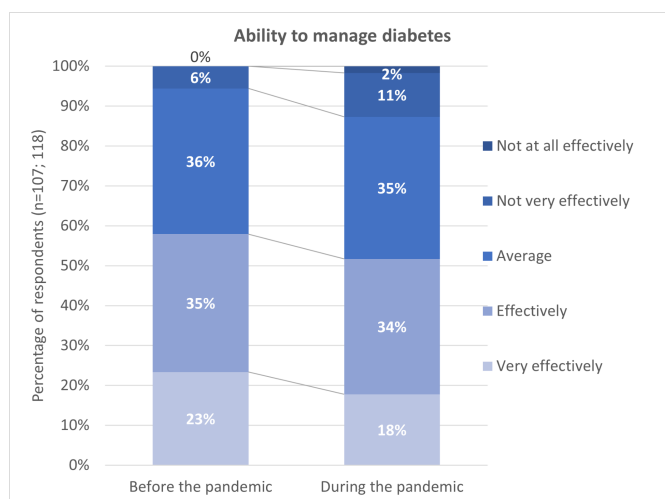
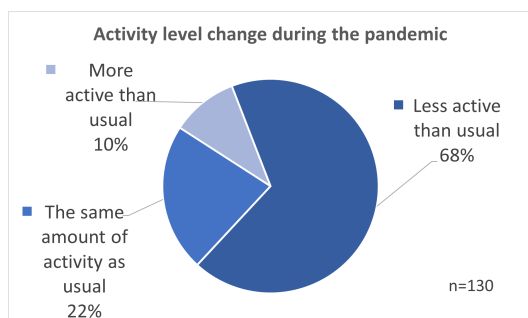
Italy

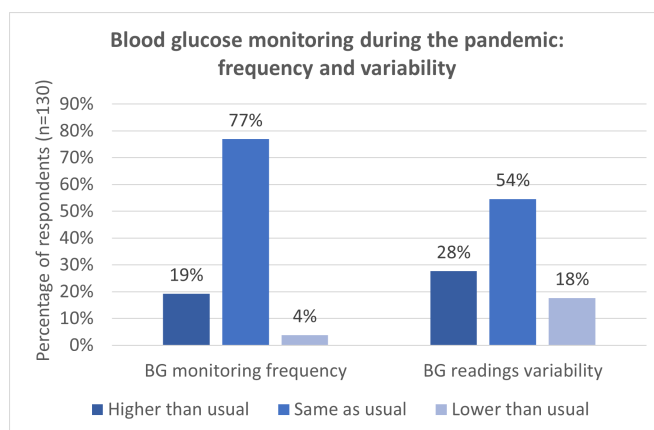
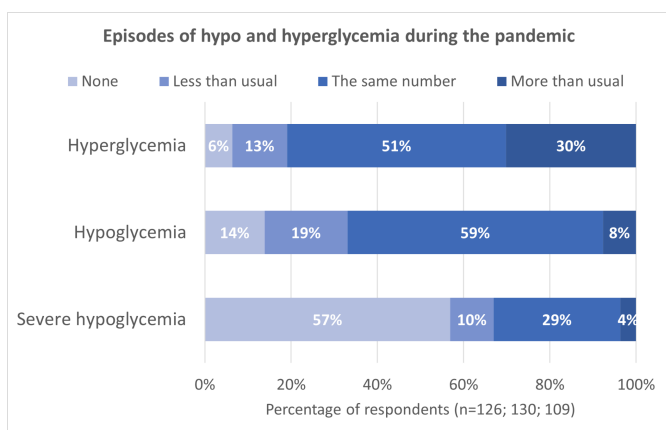
### Summary

In February and March 2020, Italy became the first European country to register a rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases and to impose stringent restrictions to curb the spread of the disease. People living with diabetes (PwD) were affected significantly as a result. The number of PwD reporting difficulties in managing their diabetes rose from 6% before COVID-19 to 13% during the first wave of the pandemic. Maintaining some form of physical activity represented a significant challenge during the lockdown, which also took a significant psychological toll on PwD. Access to diabetes medicines, supplies and equipment was disrupted. Some 21% of respondents struggled to get their medication, 26% reported difficulties accessing their diabetes supplies (needles, test strips, etc.) and 14% found it challenging to access their technological equipment (blood glucose readers, insulin pumps). Access to care was also a major issue, with many appointments cancelled or rescheduled. Virtual healthcare solutions were widely available and were generally well received. Two thirds of respondents to the survey did not receive any advice from their usual healthcare professionals and the lack of guidance was widely felt, with 70% who would have wanted to receive more diabetes-specific information. Nevertheless, for those respondents who received guidance from their healthcare teams, a much greater proportion than in many other European countries was contacted proactively.

### Diabetes Management

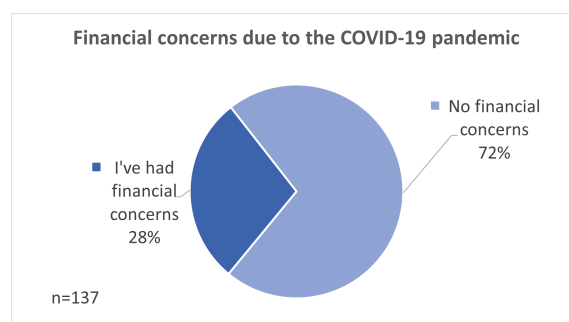
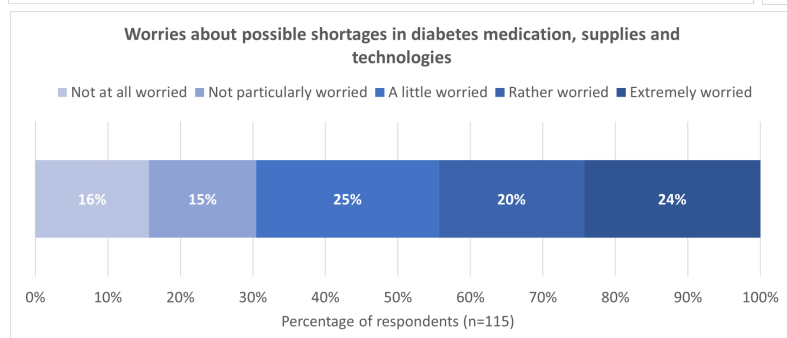
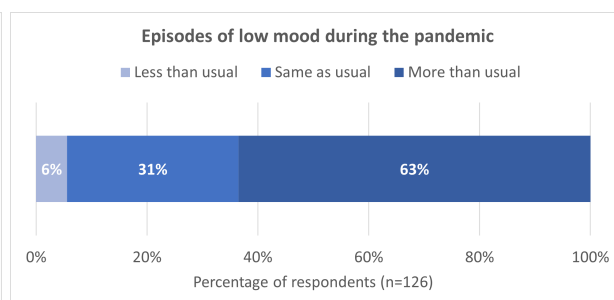
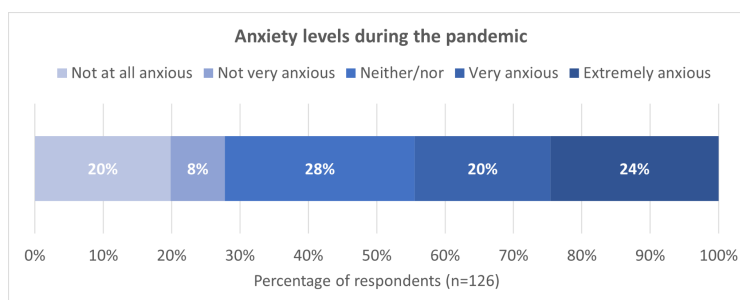
While 81% of survey respondents were able to follow their diabetes regimen as well as or better than usual during the COVID-19 crisis, just 52% rated their overall ability to manage their condition as effective or very effective. Physical activity levels fell sharply, with 68% of respondents exercising less and 32% gaining weight. There was an increase in blood glucose variability and in the frequency of hyperglycemic episodes.

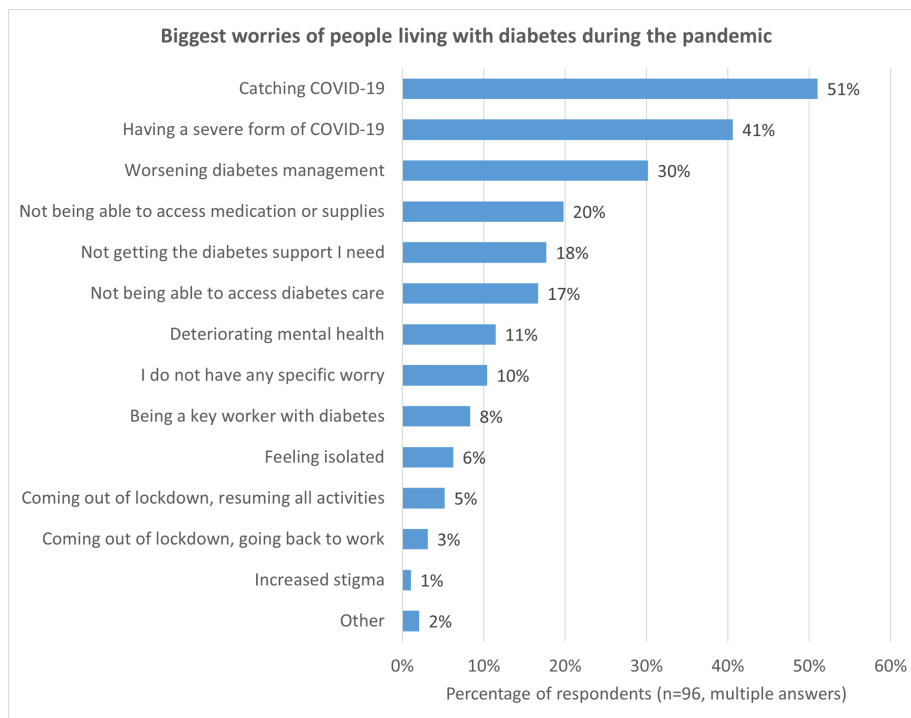




## Psychological Impact

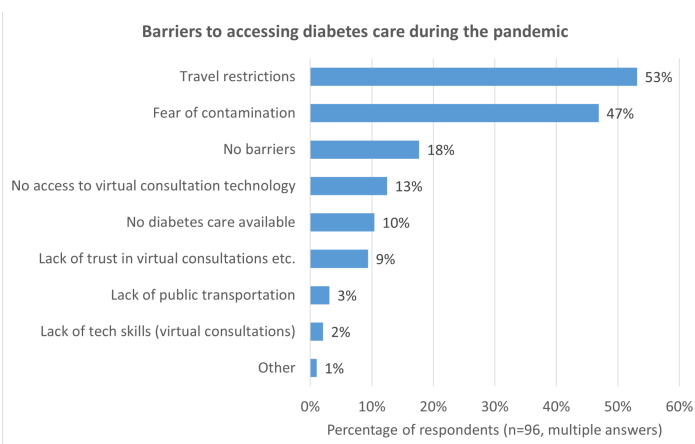
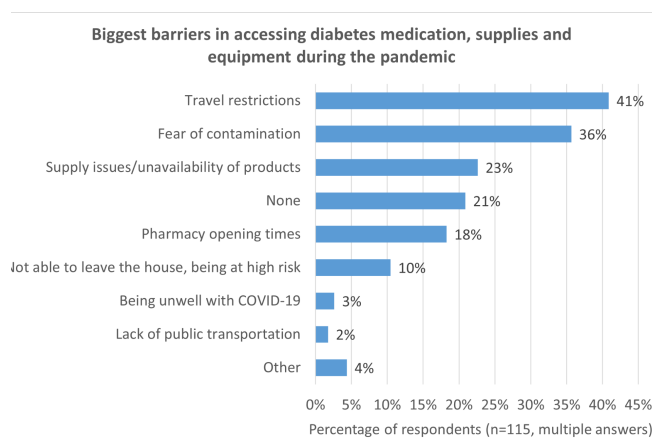
The COVID-19 pandemic had significant psychological consequences for PwD in Italy. Some 44% were more or much more anxious than before the crisis and an equal proportion worried about shortages of medicines and supplies. Close to two thirds of respondents experienced more frequent episodes of low mood than usual. Catching COVID-19 and developing a severe form of the disease were the concerns most frequently cited by survey respondents, followed by the fear of not being able to manage one's diabetes as well as usual. As well as medicines and supplies, respondents feared not being able to access the diabetes support and care they needed. In addition, 28% of the respondents experienced financial concerns.

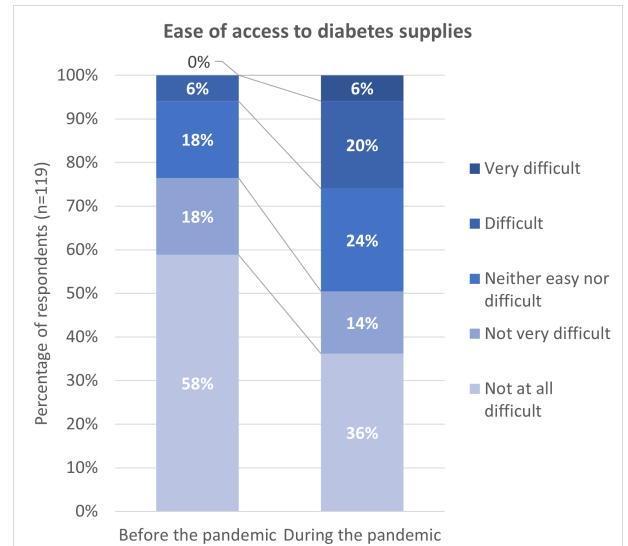
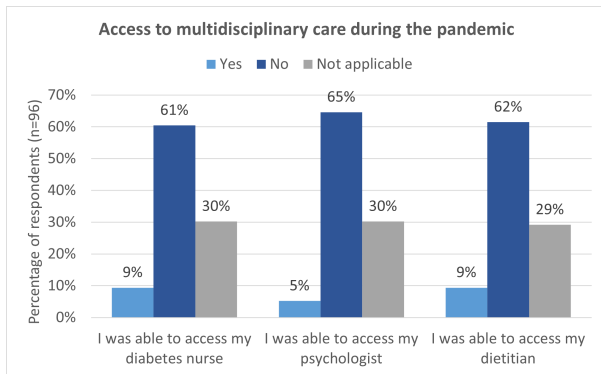




## Access to Medicines, Supplies, Technologies, and Care

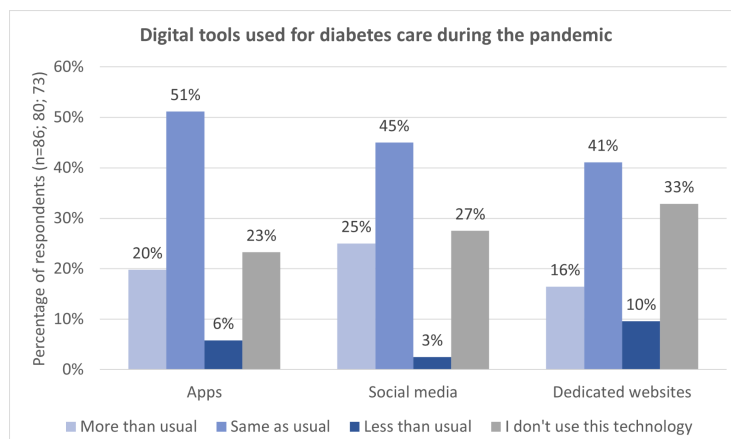
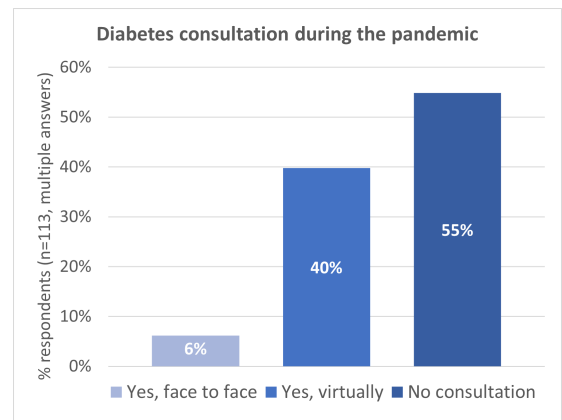
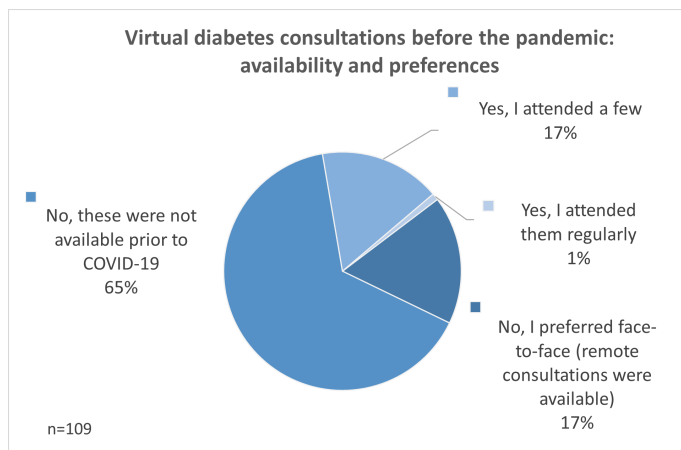
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of respondents who indicated experiencing some degree of difficulty in accessing medicines, supplies, and technologies rose sharply, for example, jumping from 6% to 26% in the case of diabetes supplies. Whereas 75% of respondents could access their supplies with few or no difficulties prior to COVID-19, the figure fell to 50% during the pandemic. There were also significant difficulties relating to access to care in Italy, with many appointments, both for routine diabetes consultations and the screening of diabetes-related complications, rescheduled or cancelled. The majority of PwD willing to make an appointment with their diabetes nurse or with a dietician were not able to obtain a consultation. Travel restrictions and fear of contamination were the biggest obstacles preventing PwD from accessing medicines, supplies, equipment, and healthcare professionals.

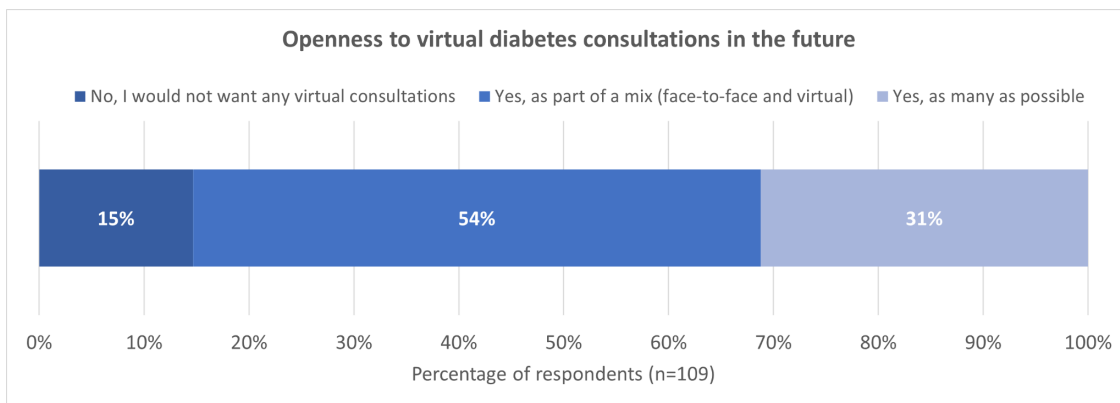




## E-health

A majority of survey respondents who had consultations during the pandemic in Italy availed themselves of remote consultations, indicating a rapid deployment of virtual healthcare solutions as a response to the crisis. Most of these consultations were held over the phone and seemed to have been well received by PwD attending them. Overall, 85% of PwD indicated that they would consider attending such consultations in the future, mostly favouring a mix of face-to-face and virtual consultations. Usage of social media, apps and dedicated websites increased during the pandemic, perhaps as a result of the lack of guidance.





## Background

This country profile was developed as part of 'Living in COVID times', an online survey conducted by IDF Europe between August and October 2020. It collected answers from 3,480 people living with diabetes across 32 countries in Europe and aimed to understand how the COVID-19 crisis affected PwD's lives and their diabetes care. In Italy, 144 people responded to the survey, 10% of them parents or caregivers and 90% themselves living with diabetes. Type 1 diabetes was better represented, while 16% of the respondents lived with type 2 diabetes. Age ranges from 21 to 80 years old were well represented and gender representation was balanced (55% women, 44% men and 1 person choosing not to identify with either). The median time respondents had been living with diabetes was between 21 and 30 years, and the answers covered a broad spectrum and reflected a variety of situations.

The Europe-wide report "Living in COVID times" can be found [here](#).

If you wish to share a testimonial of your life with diabetes in Italy during the pandemic, write to [idfeurope@idf-europe.org](mailto:idfeurope@idf-europe.org). We look forward to hearing from you!



**International  
Diabetes Federation  
Europe**