



## **WE CAN BE STRONGER THAN DIABETES**

### ***CDC Women & Diabetes: Across the Life Stages***

*This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

Four women - each from a different “life stage” and each confronting the *same* serious disease.

- I have diabetes.
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More than 9 million American women have diabetes - the fifth leading cause of death by disease among women. And it is a strong contributor to heart disease, the leading cause of death among women. In the last ten years there has been a 50% increase in diabetes. Diabetes costs the nation about \$132 billion dollars a year, including medical and non-medical costs. The average yearly healthcare costs for a person with diabetes in 2002 was \$13,243 dollars. It is an epidemic. But there are ways to prevent and control it.

Quinn Nystrom was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when she was 13.

- When I was first diagnosed, I was ashamed of having diabetes.
- Kids at school didn't understand what diabetes was and they thought I was contagious and would move away from me.

That summer, Quinn went to a camp with other children living with diabetes and her outlook changed.

- At camp, you're all struggling with the same issues.
- When I left the camp, I was no longer embarrassed of having diabetes.
- I felt, “I need to go and do something about this.” I need to go and educate my classmates, my friends, my teachers, and my family members, because I want them to have the understanding that I have about it.

Most adolescents with diabetes, like Quinn, have Type 1 diabetes -- where the pancreas makes no insulin for the body.

- I manage my diabetes by doing a blood glucose check about 4-6 times a day. I am on a regimen where you take a shot for every time you eat. An important part of controlling your diabetes is staying in shape and staying active.

Although most adolescents have type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, which is linked to family history, obesity, and physical inactivity, is becoming more common in this age group. The onset of type 2 diabetes can be prevented, delayed, or minimized with attention to diet and exercise.

- This is a disease where you're the only one who can make the choices. Your parents can't choose for you, your doctors can't choose for you, your boyfriends or your girlfriends can't choose for you. You're the only one who can choose to live that long and healthy life.

Jennifer Schlimm is the human resources manager at a hi-tech firm. She's thirty years old and five months pregnant.

- Any pregnancy requires great care and diligence, but women with diabetes face special challenges.

Uncontrolled diabetes can cause birth defects. However, if it is controlled before and during pregnancy, the risks can be greatly reduced.

- I have Type I diabetes and for the last ten years, I have been on the insulin pump.
- I control my diabetes by testing my blood sugar, taking my insulin, eating the right amount of foods, getting enough exercise. It is a constant part of my life - remembering to be healthy for both myself, but also for the baby that I am carrying.
- My husband has really embraced the disease, as I have embraced it, and has really recognized that it is a big part of our lives, and not just a big part of mine.

Between 2.5 and 4 percent of pregnant women in the United States have gestational diabetes. This is usually temporary, but these women and their children have a greater chance of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

- You are not alone in this world. You can take control of this disease with all the many tools and resources that are out there, and this disease does not have to control you.
- Keeping my diabetes under control is about keeping my life under control.

Betsy Rodriguez comes from a family of women living with diabetes – her grandmother, mother, and now, her daughter.

- My daughter is always telling me, "Mama, I'm looking at you. You are my role model."
- Right now, we're eating more vegetables, we're eating more fruits, we're reducing the portions that we're eating so, in that way, we're losing weight also and we're feeling better.

Research shows that walking 30 minutes per day can reduce the risk of getting type 2 diabetes by almost 60 percent.

- Minorities have a lot of trouble getting quality health services. For instance, they have language barriers, they don't have health insurance, they don't know how the health system works here. So it's really hard for them.
- I am so lucky having the family that I have. I have a lot of support. We're a happy family living with diabetes.
- Diabetes is a disease that makes you feel bad, but nothing hurts. When I was diagnosed in 1997, I was devastated.
- But, I knew I had to follow the instructions: I went to the doctor, got treated, got a diet, drank plenty of water, lose weight, got my eyes checked so that I would live a happy, normal life.

Diabetes can result in many complications, including heart disease and stroke, blindness, kidney disease, amputations, and pregnancy complications. Yet there is good news. Women working with their healthcare providers can help delay and prevent these complications.

- I don't feel devastated anymore, because I learned that you can live a happy, normal life with diabetes.
- If I get in a lot of activities, I feel better. I take computer, I do water aerobics, I do sewing, and I sing in the chorus.
- I keep a list of everything I eat, because I do not want to get sick.
- My philosophy that keeps me going is: I want to live a long time. I want to feel good and look good.
- Now, I'm single, and I notice the men say hello to me now more than ever -- and tell me how good I look.
- I want to live a long time for me because there are a lot of things in life I haven't done yet. And believe me, I will do them. Because you know why? Because I know I still got it!

We must change the way we think about diabetes, help people understand the disease, what steps they can take to prevent it, and for those who develop diabetes, help them reduce the related complications.

Four women with one thing in common. They are making healthy choices to keep their diabetes under control.

- I am a woman living with diabetes and what I would like to tell to other women is to test their blood sugars, to eat right, to be active, and to learn as much as possible about the condition. In that way, you will keep diabetes under control, you will have your life under control, and you will be happy.
- Take your medication. Get on a diet. Lose some weight. Keep your eyes checked, so you can live a happy normal life. Don't hide your sickness. Do something about it.
- Being female and wanting to be a mother, I don't want to let my husband down, I don't want to let my family down, and I definitely don't want to let this baby down by not taking control of this disease.

- Diabetes has made me a more independent person. It's made me take charge of my life. I knew with this disease I could either be the victim and sit back and be depressed for the rest of my life or I could be that victor and stand up and take charge of my life and lead a an almost normal life and a wonderful life at that. I hope everybody out there will choose to be the victor instead of the victim, because it's your choice.

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