

Type 2, Part 4

By Suze Hargraves

Living with diabetes requires that we not only understand the impact the diagnosis has on our bodies but the impact it will have in our lives. In this final segment on Type 2 diabetes we're going to look at some of more unexpected challenges of living with diabetes.

First and foremost: You are not a disease. Repeat after me: "I have a disease. I am NOT the disease." That applies to any and all chronic illnesses. You cannot define your entire identity by a disease. Having diabetes is just a part of your physical makeup that requires care and management. Diabetes does not change who you are nor does it determine who you can be.

Secondly, if you are a person with diabetes, it's important to educate yourself as much as possible, but be careful you don't create an environment where your support network feels alienated. Don't fall into the trap of lecturing because you want to share all that you've learned. Remember there's a time and place for everything.

On the flip side, you may find yourself being cornered by well-meaning people who think they've got the inside info on everything a person with Type 2 should, shouldn't, could or couldn't do up to and including your choice of sock colors. Learn to nod, change the subject or walk away. Some people just think they know what's best for everyone on the planet.

Deciding to change is never easy, but being forced to change because of a medical diagnosis can really rub some people the wrong way. If your healthcare provider tells you to put down the cookies and go for a walk it's not because they're trying to annoy you. Honestly, they have better things to do than sit around and think up ways to make your life "difficult". They're trying to make your life easier and more enjoyable. Maintaining a healthy weight and exercise are critical to quality of life for a person with diabetes.

As always, being an active participant in your healthcare is critical to your wellbeing, especially after a diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes. If you're confused ask questions. If you're feeling overwhelmed or depressed please tell your healthcare provider. Being diagnosed with a chronic health condition is a life-changing moment and it's very natural to have a whole big bag of mixed emotions along for the ride. Feeling emotions such as guilt, fear, regret, sadness and more are all natural companions of a life-changing event. Don't be afraid to get help.

Last but not least, don't keep your diagnosis a secret. Life-threatening situations and easily misunderstood symptoms can lead to devastating results. Did you know that a person with diabetes may appear drunk if they've skipped a meal? Now imagine that's an employee in a large store. Customers may see "drunk" but a manager in the know will be able to spot an employee in a critical health crisis. Having diabetes is nothing to be ashamed of. Don't try to keep a secret that could cost you your life.

By making good choices about lifestyle and diet we can minimize our risk of Type 2 diabetes. Manage the risk. Meet the challenge.

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