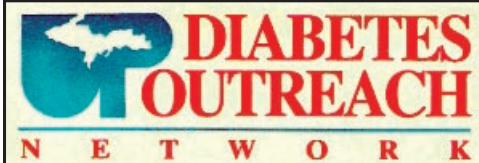




NATIONAL

Diabetes

MONTH



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Sandra Gordon, Gwinn resident and retired Air Force nurse, has lived with type 2 diabetes for the past 16 years. Being Active Duty Air Force, Sandy was prepared to deal with a lot of things but the diagnosis of diabetes was not one of them. When the diabetes educator first told her that she needed to attend diabetes education classes, Sandy thought it was just basic education because of her family history. Both Sandy's mother and grandmother were living with diabetes.

After attending classes every two weeks for six months, it finally clicked for Sandy. She wasn't attending class because she had pre-diabetes but because she already had diabetes. "When I left class that day I cried," Sandy says. "I wasn't taking medication, I was focused on diet and exercise. I just didn't get it. I didn't hear it. I didn't hear the diabetes educator say, "You have diabetes." I felt as a nurse I should have known better. And I cried because my mother had such a horrible time with her diabetes."

Sandy feels her mother's diabetes was mismanaged simply because people didn't understand as much as they do now. Sandy watched her mother go through problems with her vision and kidneys. Her mother also developed neuropathy (nerve problems) in her feet, which led to amputation of her toes. Eventually Sandy's mother died from complications of her uncontrolled diabetes. Years earlier, Sandy's grandmother also experienced complications and death linked to poorly managed diabetes. Sandy's grandmother never had access to diabetes education.

Fortunately for Sandy and the many others living with diabetes today, the treatment of diabetes with diet, exercise, oral medications and insulin, the prevention of complications through regular tests and a better understanding of proper blood glucose control has come a long way. Technologies and testing have advanced greatly and diabetes education is now more widely available. In fact, research shows that seeing a diabetes educator regularly is key to helping people better control their diabetes.

Sandy says she felt overwhelmed with all the information her diabetes educator was giving her, yet felt terrified to be on her own. KI Sawyer Air Force Base was closing and Sandy knew that meant her lifeline, her diabetes educator, would be leaving as well. Sandy knew that opportunities existed in Marquette for education but felt that would be too far to drive from Gwinn in the middle of the winter. Sandy also remembers meeting Ann Constance, director of the U.P. Diabetes Outreach Network (UDPON) once and decided to give Ann a call about starting a support group in the Gwinn area.

Ann and the UPDON staff offered Sandy suggestions and support but Sandy really took the project on herself. She contacted the Gwinn High School and asked if one of the classes would take on the project of making a video for her to share with the first support group class that would be meeting. The students agreed and created a video of Sandy and her diabetes educator talking like it was the first time they had a class together.

The first meeting of the support group brought out around 30 people. Ann Constance spoke and they showed the video made by the Gwinn High school students. The evening was so well received that the Gwinn Area Diabetes Support Group was born. Sandy has been at the helm ever since, but notes that even though a few people have stepped up to help after a decade of organizing the support group, it is time for someone else to take over. Attendance has waned over the past few years with a core group of about 15 still attending but Sandy still feels support groups have an important place for people who are living with diabetes.

PATH (Personal Action Towards Health) classes are also helpful for people who are living with diabetes or any chronic health condition. Sandy has not only participated in this six-week course but is also a trained leader. PATH offers many different tools for people to use to help them live healthier lives with chronic health conditions like diabetes. As part of the program, people also learn how to make action plans, a way to break down a bigger goal, like good blood sugar control or weight loss, into smaller more achievable goals.

Sandy says, "When you are first diagnosed with a disease you are often overwhelmed with the enormity of it. You are given so much information right away that it can be quite overwhelming and even hard to adjust because there is so much you are learning you need to do. PATH and the action plans can help you start working on at least one change so you don't feel overwhelmed. PATH helps you feel success by breaking down all the thing you need to do. Attending a PATH class and even during the ones I've taught I feel 've learned a lot, not just from the lessons, but from the other participants in the class."

Sandy feels fortunate that she has had opportunities to develop relationships with a diabetes educator and with others living with diabetes through the Gwinn Support Group and the PATH classes. "I feel that if my mother and grandmother had had the education and opportunities I have had they would have done much better, been cared for better and lived much longer." Since Sandy's initial diagnosis, her sister and one of her brothers, along with her mother's two sisters, have all been diagnosed with diabetes. Sandy's advice to them was, "You don't have to become a controlled diabetic in one week. It takes time but you need to keep at it. Learn what you can, make the changes you need a step at a time and surround yourself with the support that's right for you."

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November 14th is World Diabetes Day

No Child Should Die From Diabetes

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases to affect children. It can strike children of any age, even toddlers and babies. If not detected early enough in a child, the disease can be fatal or result in serious brain damage. Yet diabetes in a child is often completely overlooked: it is often misdiagnosed as the flu or it is not diagnosed at all. Every parent, school teacher, school nurse, doctor and anyone involved in the care of children should be familiar with the warning signs and alert to the diabetes threat.

Children used to be affected only by type 1 diabetes, the kind that can NOT be prevented and must be treated with insulin. More and more children are now developing type 2 diabetes, the kind that can be prevented and is linked to our lifestyles. Below are more details about type 2 diabetes and kids:

Kids and Type 2 Diabetes: What You Need to Know

- Kids are developing adult (type 2) diabetes.
- Many may have diabetes and not know it!
- Diabetes can cause many serious problems if not caught early and treated.

Which Kids Are at Risk for Having or Developing Type 2 Diabetes?

- Kids who are overweight.
- Kids who are not very active.
- Kids who have family members with diabetes.
- American Indian, African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/South Pacific Islander children, but it also occurs in Caucasians.
- Kids between the ages of 8 and 19.

Should Your Child Be Checked for Type 2 Diabetes?

- See your doctor.

How can I Find Out if my Child Has Type 2 Diabetes?

- One or two blood tests that check for extra glucose (sugar) in the blood can be done by your doctor.

What are Some Signs of Diabetes? In type 2 diabetes, often there are no signs!!!

- Some Children May Have One Or More of the Following:**
- Dark patches of skin on their necks or underarms. It often looks like dirt on their skin! This is the most common in kids with dark skin.
 - Eat or drink more than usual.
 - Weight loss even though they may be eating a lot.
 - Need to urinate often.
 - Feel tired.

Can I Reduce the Risk of My Child Developing Diabetes?

- You can help your child reduce the risk of developing Diabetes by encouraging:**
- At least 60 minutes of activity on most days. Let them choose an activity they will enjoy.
 - Fruits and vegetables.
 - Whole grain bread and cereals.
 - Fewer fried foods.
 - Small portions at meals and for snacks.

If your child develops diabetes, all of the tips listed above can help control diabetes.

Michigan Diabetes Outreach Networks (MDON)
Strengthening Diabetes Care in Michigan
www.diabetesinmichigan.org

Your child's physician team and local diabetes educators can give you support and the information you need to help your child conquer this preventable disease. Children with type 2 diabetes should:

- **PHYSICIAN:** Have a medical check up every 3-6 months to review blood sugar levels, and to evaluate whether their treatment plan needs to be changed.
- **DENTIST:** Every 6 months have a dental exam to check for gum problems.
- **EYE SPECIALIST:** Get a dilated eye exam by an eye care specialist every year.
- **FEET:** Have a yearly foot exam.

And for parents, if you smoke, QUIT! In a study published by the British Medical Journal in 2006, it is shown that breathing other people's smoke raises the risk of developing blood sugar problems that can lead to diabetes. If you can't stop smoking for yourself, do it for your child.

COMING NEXT WEEK: Prevention is Possible!

This is the second installment in a 4-part weekly series about Diabetes, brought to you by The Mining Journal and these sponsors. For all your diabetic needs, see these businesses:

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