

An Attack on the Body

By: Kenzie Davis

One minute life was “normal” and the next my house was filled with hundreds of things that could kill my brother. Just by looking at him (or any other diabetic), you couldn’t tell that the loud energetic 4-year-old had (has) an autoimmune disease. He liked to run and the kid could devour a hot dog in seconds. He seemed to be a normal growing kid, but eventually, we would learn that he had Type 1 Diabetes. Type 1 Diabetes (formerly known as Juvenile Diabetes) is a chronic condition where the individual’s pancreas is producing little to no insulin (the hormone responsible for regulating blood sugar and allowing the glucose to enter cells to give the person energy). My little brother was diagnosed June 13th, 2017 after my mom had noticed my brother was showing symptoms she had recognized were associated with diabetes. He was exhibiting an increased thirst and hunger, wetting the bed after being completely potty trained, and was constantly needing to use the restroom. We knew there was a chance he would end up with it as his father is also a diabetic, but the new reality was still a shock. In the two years that we have lived with a diabetic, my family has learned so much about the care that goes into being diabetic, and the lack of education our society has about diabetes.

Type 1 and Type 2: What is the Difference?

The short answer is essentially everything. A [diabetes care journal](#) written by authors Jane L. Chiang, M. Sue Kirkman, Lori M.B. Laffel, and Anne L. Peters says: “While both type 1 and type 2 diabetes result in hyperglycemia, the pathophysiology and etiology of the diseases are distinct and require us to consider each type of diabetes independently.” Type 1 is essentially the body’s immune system attacking itself. Type 2 on the other hand still really has no known source of production. The media emphasizes that diabetes, especially Type 2 comes from a person *eating too much*, or *being overweight*. In reality, this isn’t the cause of either one. Type 1’s onset is usually following the flu or some other virus where the immune system over attacks cells. On top of the sick cells, the body will begin to attack the healthy cells of the pancreas. The two are similar in the way that an individual with either type of diabetes is producing an inadequate amount of insulin. Researchers have found that although it is very rare, there is a way to “reverse” Type 2. A better way to explain it is that there are more ways to lessen the effect of diabetes on a Type 2 individual than there is for a Type 1 person. At the moment there is no cure for either type of diabetes.

Who is Affected?

According to [Beyond Type 1](#), there is nearly 1.25 million Americans who have been diagnosed with this form of diabetes. This number is growing at such a fast rate that by 2050 they are projecting for 250 million Americans to have been diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. Beyond Type 1 touched on the increase when they said: “There was a **21% increase** in people diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes between 2001 and 2009 under the age of 20”. There are currently 200,000 adolescents (people under 20) who have been diagnosed with Type 1. By 2050 that number will rise to 600,000. That would be more people who lived in Milwaukee Wisconsin in 2018. With how fast the numbers are growing, in no time this number will hit 1 million.

Care Process

Each person with diabetes has a different way of care. There is no routine diabetes. The average diabetic will prick their finger over 27,000 thousand times in their life. They will undergo years and years of tests to ensure their diabetes didn't trigger some other type of condition or disease. Diabetics are more prone to things like infections and thyroid disorders. Diabetics also have problems with their eye sight and the nerves in their fingers and toes. There is no set way to care for a diabetic because every person is different. Their body will respond to anything the way it wants to just like a person without diabetes. Doctors ask their diabetic patients to make sure they are keeping track of what they are eating and ensure they are constantly looking at their blood sugars to make sure they are in the safe range (different all throughout the day and different for ages).

How to Deal With a Diabetic

The first thing to remember is that they are humans too and just because they have diabetes, they are still able to the things every nondiabetic can do. Here are a few things to remember when interacting with a diabetic.

1. Never ask: "Do you have the bad type of diabetes". Let's be real for a second, is there a good type of diabetes? No, there isn't. Both types of diabetes aren't a good type. Both affect the lives drastically and could hospitalize the diabetic at any time.
2. Remember that at any time something could go wrong and the diabetic could have severe complications. Never mention to a diabetic that you knew someone who had serious complications and seriously never mention someone you knew who had diabetes who unfortunately passed away.
3. Don't tell the person you didn't know they had diabetes or that they don't look like someone who would have diabetes. The last thing they want is to be labeled as their disease. They are themselves.

In my house, the medicine that helps my brother could kill him. The food he once ate whenever he wanted, now has to be looked at differently. Any simple sickness we overlooked before could take a turn for the worst. He will spend the rest of his life paying thousands of dollars a year to ensure he has the supplies he needs to continue living. Every day he continues to prove just how strong he is. Just like every other diabetic, he is a warrior. He is now six years old and doesn't let diabetes get in the way of his life. He still loves to run and the boy can still devour a hotdog. To donate to help to find a cure, visit the [JDRF](#) (an organization that actively works to find ways to reduce the impact of diabetes on families) website.