

Dreams and a Mother's Worry

Hi, my name is Samantha and I am 14 years old. I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes when I was about 3 years old, so I have had Diabetes for around 11 years. I do not remember a time when I was not 'counting carbs', checking my blood or getting insulin. I began giving my own insulin shots when I was around 5 years old. My mom says I never cried when I had to have a shot. It just became a way of life.

I have learned to cope with my Diabetes, but it took some time. Whereas most people feel hungry and they eat, I must check my blood, measure out my proportions, and then dose for my food. Also before bed, I must check my blood and give corrections and maybe even have a juice or two.

When I go on a sleep over I have to plan ahead. The home that I am going to needs to understand and feel comfortable with taking care of me if I need assistance. When I was younger, I did not stay overnight at many of my friends houses because their parents did not feel comfortable with their knowledge of type 1 Diabetes to allow me to stay over.

Also, any time we go anywhere away from my house, I have to take 'supplies' with me. Even walking to the neighbor's house I never leave the house without my blood glucose monitor, some juice or glucose tabs and according to how long we will be gone, sometimes I have to take extra insulin, pump supplies, my emergency insulin pen, etc.

What I don't like about being diabetic is how no matter how hard I try to stay on top of my blood sugar when I am getting any exercise at school, home, or at my 4-H leaders house, I always seem to go low. It always seems like I am drinking a juice or Gatorade at least twice a day. As I get older it's been a little scary, my blood sugar is like a rollercoaster so I have to be really careful not to be by myself too long in case I start to go out!

Though it takes time to get use to, there are things I actually look forward to about being a Diabetic. The reason is because I get to teach people what Diabetes is, how it is caused, and how it can be controlled. Every year from 1st to 6th grade, I did a presentation to my class about Diabetes so both my teacher and classmates could both understand Diabetes and what happens when I go low. I think by sharing my experiences with others I can help younger kids accept their problem and not be so scared.

My first pediatrician/endocrinologist always told my mom to let me be a kid and he told her not to shelter me. He believed that I should be treated like every other kid and I have been. The only thing different about me than other kids is that I have Type 1 diabetes.

I had hoped some day to become a Marine Biologist. I am very interested in the environment and keeping our marine life healthy. My dream won't be possible without changes happening with how I treat my diabetes. I learned last year about exciting research being conducted at ICVBM. Wow, how cool if a little bump under the skin could grow its own blood vessels and work like a pancreas! No more insulin pumps, Yeah - Bio-Pump! Just the hope that there may be new treatment options for me which would allow me to follow my dreams, is all I can hope for.

I wanted to find a way to help. Next year I will be volunteering in the labs at ICVBM to help fight diabetes. I may be young, but I am determined to help any way I can to help others fight this disease. If I can help make a difference, so can you!



As Samantha's mother, I was told to let her be a child, like every other child. That same doctor also told me that if the bath water was dirty every night, it had been a good day! Basically, he was saying to let her play, run, jump and participate with everyone else; the only thing holding her back should be her own abilities. I think that was probably the best advice we could have been given. As a parent, you want to protect your child but to have one with a chronic disease such as diabetes, I feel it is even more so. There were so many difficulties. Allowing her to spend the night at a friend's house was gut wrenching; I never slept when she was not with me. And it was not because I was so protective or that I thought she might get hurt, it was because of her diabetes and the possibility of something happening. Having her not be invited to spend the night due to her diabetes was even more hurtful. Often, friend's parents and even family members do not feel comfortable with the diabetes, isolating Sam even more to make her feel different.

As a teenage girl she has had to learn different ways to deal with the diabetes than she did as a child. While the insulin pump has made our life easier, we have had to learn how to wear the pump if she is wearing a dress (as opposed to a skirt with a waist line). We have had to learn how to deal with the pump and bathing suits and wanting to 'look normal'. When going to a water park or swimming pool, she has to take the pump off and not stay in the pool too long as she cannot go without insulin for any length of time. So she has to get out of the pool, check her blood and usually put on the pump to get the needed insulin. Today, if she is engrossed in a project or working on the farm with her llamas, she has to watch and pay attention to her body and her own body 'signs' of a low blood sugar. She has to stop what she is doing and check her blood to make sure she is not going low with the activity or exercise. Any activity, whether riding a bike, or walking in the neighborhood is never just an activity as a diabetic. You never go anywhere empty handed. There are always things to do prior to beginning and stopping in the middle to check and when you end, checking again. Usually during the middle of the chosen activity, you make adjustments whether to your insulin and or blood sugar. Just today, she was at the farm working with her llamas and ran out of insulin. I had to make a trip to our home to get the insulin she needed and take it to the farm for her. Again, this is one more thing that someone without diabetes does not have to think or worry about. Most teenagers can't remember to pick up their socks; a forgetful moment could result in serious complication or even death; THAT IS A MOTHERS WORRY!

We are not able to choose if we are diabetic or not but we are able to choose how we deal with it and I believe we, Samantha, has chosen to deal with it and be as

normal as a type 1 diabetic can be. She does not 'feel' like she is different because of the disease. She has chosen to embrace it as who she is until a cure is found. I am very proud of Sam and her interest to educate or help others.

Diabetes is a chronic, serious disease that can affect different parts of your body through its complications. Diabetes can damage your eyes, heart and blood vessels, kidneys, nerves, teeth and gums. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to heart attack; stroke; amputation; blindness; kidney failure; tooth and gum disease; as well as reproduction complications. As her mother, I pray for a cure. I hope that one day in her lifetime she will know what it is like to go without checking her blood, counting carbs and making sure she has insulin. Research projects in Dr. Keith March's labs continue to be our "north star". Please help this world class center do what they have proven to do in the past; find cures and save lives.

Robin