



THE
FEARLESS
DIABETIC

How to
Battle a
Relentless
Disease
and **WIN**

BEN MILSOM

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CHAPTER 1

Diabetes 101: If You Don't Know, Now You Know

Never let the things you cannot do prevent you from doing the things you can.

—JOHN WOODEN

Fears and Myths about Type 1 Diabetes

The initial diagnosis of T1D can hit the patient and their family like a Mack truck. The person with T1D goes from feelings of discomfort—weight loss, thirst, constant urination—and the sense that something is wrong to hearing the doctor say they have diabetes. That's when fear sets in:

- What do you mean I have a disease?
- How am I going to cope with this?
- Who will help me?
- Do I know anyone with this condition?

The initial diagnosis is like pushing someone to the edge of a cliff. A happy, successful normal life is on the other side of a very large valley as soon that first diagnosis occurs. At first, the bridge connecting the two is very wobbly and has a lot of holes in it. The T1D and their family are at a

loss as to what resources are available. My hope is that the information in this book helps to create a concrete solid path to the other side. In the following chapters, I share stories of sunshine as well as some very dark stories. My intent is to help you understand that while Type 1 Diabetes is a 24/7 disease, it's not a death sentence. The following is a list of the most common fears and myths surrounding T1D:

Fears

- You won't be able to live a normal life.
- You won't be able to have children.
- You can't swim with an insulin pump.
- You won't be able to play sports.
- You might have a seizure, which could be fatal.

As a healthy seventeen-year-old boy, my biggest fear was whether I would have the ability to play college football and have a normal college experience. Was I going to be able to stay up late and have fun with friends? Would this change my future plans? I also was really worried that I wouldn't be able to have a family one day.

Once I knew that with normal blood sugar control, I could live a normal life, I knew this would be something I could handle.

I just needed a chance to fight it.

Myths

- Diabetes is only for overweight people.
- Diabetes is managed by a pill.
- Just don't eat sugar and you will be OK.
- An insulin pump will do all the work and manage your diabetes for you.
- You get diabetes from eating a lot of sugar.
- It's your fault your child has diabetes.

- Type 1 diabetes can be reversed with diet and exercise.
- Kids will grow out of T1D.
- People with diabetes can't eat sugar.
- I can control my blood sugar with cinnamon.

Before you can thrive with T1D, it's important to know as much as you can about what you're dealing with. There are a lot of misconceptions, such as:

- You develop T1D from eating too much sugar.
- You could have prevented getting T1D.
- T1D will slow you down and prevent you from living the life you want.

None of these are true. Above all, it's not your fault that you have T1D. The leading theory is that you were born with the gene, and it took a certain amount of time for that to develop into full-blown diabetes. This could have been triggered by an illness or some other life circumstance that causes the disease to fully develop.

On the other side of all the misconceptions are the facts:

- This disease never takes a day off.
- It never slows down
- It never gives you a break
- You must monitor your blood sugar numbers twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

There are times when you are resting and must get up to treat low blood sugar. There are times when you are watching a movie, out on a date, or in the middle of a game and need to give yourself insulin because your nerves cause high blood sugar. This disease does not rest, and you must learn to

manage all the highs and lows. You have to be prepared for the high highs and the low lows.

Type 1 or Type 2—What's the Difference?

Thirty-seven million people in the United States have diabetes, and this number continues to grow at an alarming rate. However, Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes are two distinct diseases, and it's important to understand the differences.

My good friends at Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) give the following definition of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.¹

Type 1 Diabetes (T1D)

Type 1 diabetes (T1D) is an autoimmune disease in which insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas are mistakenly destroyed by the body's immune system. T1D seems to have a genetic component. It occurs in children and adults. Its causes are not fully known, and there is currently no cure. People with T1D are dependent on injected or pumped insulin to survive.

Type 2 Diabetes (T2D)

Type 2 diabetes (T2D) is often diagnosed later in life and can be due to genetic predisposition or behavior. T2D is a metabolic disorder in which a person's body still produces insulin but is unable to use it effectively. It can be managed with diet and exercise or medication. More serious cases may require insulin therapy.

Though they share the name diabetes, the two diseases are quite different.

Signs of T1D

- Frequent urination
- Increased thirst

- Dry mouth
- Itchy or dry skin
- Increased appetite
- Unexplained weight loss
- Yeast infections

Insulin allows the body to convert sugar (glucose) found in food to energy. As the body becomes incapable of creating insulin, T1D symptoms start to appear. People are typically diagnosed with T1D after showing these symptoms.

If not treated properly, people with T1D are vulnerable to health issues ranging from minor to severe. If people with T1D spend the majority of their time with blood-glucose levels outside the recommended healthy range, it can lead to potentially deadly episodes of hyperglycemia (high blood sugar) and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Chronic high blood sugar often causes devastating health complications later in life, including blindness, kidney failure, heart disease, and nerve damage that can lead to amputations.

Key Takeaways

- T1D is not your fault.
- Know the differences between T1D and T2D.
- Discern between the facts and the myths.
- Face the fears, but then dispel them.
- Be prepared, but don't let T1D hold you back from living your best life.

1 Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, <https://www.jdrf.org/t1d-resources/about/>. Used with permission.

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