

# A life filled with needles

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life filled with needles... think about it.

Would it be worth it to regulate food consumption every day, to be consistently tired and fatigue every day, to live with diabetes every day, and to stick a needle in flesh every day? Growing up with a mother that suffered diabetes as an adult, it is easy to say that when one person in the family has diabetes, it affects the whole family. The disease can attack anyone at any age, even if exercise and a healthy diet play a huge role in one's life. If it is difficult for an adult to endure diabetes, it is most certainly difficult for a teenager to withstand it. So, why should teenagers care about diabetes? Creating awareness for diabetes can help answer that question, along with informing teens about how diabetes alter one's lifestyle, how fitting in would be difficult, and the financial aspects of this chronic disease. Diabetes can impact an adolescent's life greatly because they have to learn and gain responsibility.

Teenagers have a difficult time coping with the fact that they have a chronic disease, so they rebel and refuse to comply with the responsibilities that this disease entitles them to do. Maybe teens choose to consider diabetes as a non-harmful disease, when in fact it is as dangerous as cancer if it is not treated properly. Medicine, whether it is shots or oral pills, has to be taken every day (Frank and Daneman 5). With responsibility comes with the job of keeping the blood glucose levels [also known as blood sugar levels] under control, in which the teen needs to check their glucose levels several times a day. If it is not under control, the teen either has hypoglycemia, which is when the blood glucose level is too low, or hyperglycemia, which is when the blood glucose level is too high (Diabetes in Children and Adolescents 1-3).

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Diabetes management is especially hard during adolescence because some researchers believe that one of the growth hormones produced during adolescence acts as an anti-insulin agent. It becomes harder to control, resulting in blood sugars that are too low or too high (Teens and Diabetes 1). If the teen is old enough to drive, they have to make sure to keep extra sweet food in the car just in case they get hypoglycemia. Also, doctors and parents encourage the adolescent to check their blood glucose level before they drive so no serious accidents happen while driving (Frank and Daneman 4; Sylvia 1). To keep the blood glucose level in check, teens need to monitor what they eat and drink, check their sugar levels before participating in an extracurricular activity such as sports, and they need to control their selves when they go to a friend's house, parties, or social gatherings (Frank and Daneman 1; Diabetes in Children and Adolescents 3). Though adolescents are required to care to their body when they have diabetes, most teenagers rebel and do not.

In all honesty, “fitting in” in school is extremely difficult when one has a disease. If a teen is too obese due to diabetes, they would resort to bulimia and anorexia to fix their body image and self-esteem. According to Troubled Teen 101, 14% of adolescents in the United States are obese, which means that 14% of those teens are at risk for various diseases, one of which including diabetes. Resorting to bulimia and anorexia as a diabetic is not healthy because it decreases the blood glucose level. A lot of diabetic teenage girls are figuring out how to make them skinner—to skip their daily insulin dose.

By doing this, they lose sugar in their urine and keep themselves underweight. This just increases earlier onset diabetes complications. Peer pressure is also a huge contribution to unhealthy diabetic teenagers. Teenagers tend to take a lot of risks, just to test their limits. Such activities such as smoking, drinking, drugs, and sex are widely caused by peer pressure as a teen.

Smoking increases the chance of blood vessel damage, heart attacks, strokes, which is what diabetes already increases the change of; so by smoking, teens divide their life in half. Alcohol has a huge effect on the blood sugar levels. Alcohol is processed in the liver, so it blocks the liver from releasing the sugar into the bloodstream which causes hypoglycemia [low blood sugar]. In the book, *Needles* by Andie Dominick: A Memoir of Growing Up With Diabetes, Andie wrote a section in the book about her as a teenager ending up in the hospital when she didn't wake up for school one day: "How did I get here?" I ask. "Where are my parents?" "You didn't wake up this morning," he informs me. "When your mom tried to get you up for school, you wouldn't respond.

"..." Your blood sugar was over five hundred," he states pointing his finger at the chart. "There was alcohol in your bloodstream. You tell me how you got here."... "You've been diabetic for almost five years now?" he asks..." At this rate you're going, you'll be lucky to live another five, he states. "I'm going to be straight with you.

Whatever it is you're doing, or not doing, you're going to end up sorry. Young diabetics come in here every day with problems. They're going blind and

their kidneys are failing because they aren't taking care of themselves." He pauses. " You are a perfect candidate for complications.

" (75-76) Andie chose to drink alcohol under peer pressure as a teenager and to stop eating and injecting her insulin; she ended up in the hospital with low blood pressure. Teenagers need to be aware of how dangerous diabetes is when mixed with alcohol. Peer pressure doesn't help the situation of coping with diabetes either, it makes it a billion times worse. Also, drugs such as marijuana can influence the teen to gain weight and eat more, which causes hyperglycemia [high blood sugar]. For teens to have unprotected sex, and end up with a pregnancy can cause complications for the mother and child. During adolescent pregnancy also known as gestational diabetes, it may cause birth defects, difficult deliveries and a greater chance of the child developing diabetes when they are born (1; Frank and Daneman 2-4).

In addition, teenagers may feel like they don't feel " normal," so they don't tell their friends about their disease and they blame themselves for developing diabetes (Lyness 3). According to Guthrie, Bartsocas, Jarosz-Chabot, and Konstantinova, in some cultures, teenagers don't even " fit in" with their family because their fathers don't accept their children if they have diabetes or any chronic diseases because they consider their children as " imperfect" (5). Frustration kicks in, and teenagers do wild activities when they are stressed out and angry. The more teenagers damage their bodies in addition to diabetes, the more the disease is going to cost to treat. If the teen has kidney failure, blindness, or they need amputations, then the treatment would be expensive with or without insurance.

According to Guthrie, Bartsocas, Jarosz-Chabot, and Konstantinova, doctors find a trend in families that have a teenager that is diagnosed with diabetes but they have low income or no insurance, it's usually associated with less screening and tests, which is extremely unhealthy for the adolescent. Even with insurance, healthcare services, medications, and diabetic supplies are still expensive. Helping teens understand the costs of diabetic needs would greatly impact their minds because paying for this chronic disease is no joke. For a teen diabetic, parents, pediatrician, and doctors encourage the teenager to create budget papers to tally up out-of-pocket expenses, to carry around their own insurance card around, or to look at the insurance/medical bills associated with diabetes (Diabetes in Children and Adolescents 1; 1-2; Enderle 2). With all of the variety of diabetes out there in the world such as Type 1, Type 2, and gestational diabetes (Diabetes in Children and Adolescents 2), would teenagers still want to overeat, to become obese, to rid exercise from their life, to be diagnosed with diabetes? Diabetes is not an illness to take lightly of, it has the capability of destroying organs and destroying lives.

Dana Hill once said, " I used the diabetes as my weapon. Of course, I was only hurting myself and making myself sicker, but I guess it was something I had to go through. I never went overboard so much that I really hurt myself, but my early teenage years were very tough." Any form of diabetes is threatening and inconvenient to any age group, but especially teenagers and adolescents. Do something before it's too late; wouldn't want to be unhealthy forever, correct?