

Leading By Example: This Grandfather Shows It's Not Too Late to Prevent type 2 Diabetes

By Sam Kitching



A few years ago, I weighed 260 pounds. A friend of mine, a retired doctor, had been telling me for years that I needed to lose some weight because I was setting myself up for health problems down the road. He told me, “Sam, I’ve got to be straight. Either you lose a little weight, or you are on your way to a heart attack or diabetes.”

I knew that at my age I was at a higher risk for diabetes. I’d taken care of my mother as diabetes robbed her of her sight. She eventually passed away from the devastating complications caused by diabetes. I knew my doctor was right. And I didn’t want my children and grandchildren to watch me suffer. But I thought it was too late for me. I was wrong.

The Diabetes Prevention Program clinical trial has shown that the onset of type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed when people at risk for type 2 diabetes lose a small amount weight by getting 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week and eating healthy foods in smaller portions. I learned that diabetes prevention is possible, it’s proven, and it’s powerful. And it’s especially powerful for people over 60—who have been shown to reduce their risk of diabetes by 71 percent. We just have to take the first step.

I realize that I have to take the lead and make sure my family knows about their risk for diabetes and the steps they can take to prevent or delay the disease. Now, at age 68, I consider myself a diabetes prevention success story. I lost more than 60 pounds and I’m enjoying a more active and healthy life. Instead of keeping chips and cookies around the house for our children and grandchildren to eat, my wife and I keep healthy snacks all of us can enjoy together. Rather than sitting around watching TV, we ride our bikes around our neighborhood.

Leading a healthy lifestyle doesn’t happen overnight, but **small steps** are delivering **big rewards** to me, my wife, and my adult children and grandchildren. And now I’ve committed myself to spreading the word. Every chance I get, I tell my friends that it’s not too late for them just because they are getting older. I take the stairs instead of the elevator. I hand carry mail around my office. I tell my colleagues that eating healthy and moving more really works. I also encourage them to find something fun: Try new recipes, take a walk with a buddy. Moving around—even a few minutes a day at first—is a great start.

I’m working with the National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP), serving as a spokesperson for their prevention campaign for older adults, “*It’s Not Too Late to Prevent Diabetes: Take Your First Step Today.*” The campaign offers tips to help fathers and grandfathers like me take small steps to lead a healthier life.

Believe me, if I can do it, anyone can. You don’t need to knock yourself out. Find fun ways to be active with people you care about, like taking an exercise class at your local YMCA or take a family walk around a museum or the zoo. Small steps lead to big rewards. It’s worth it. Take your first step today.

For more tips on how you can prevent type 2 diabetes, visit <http://www.ndep.nih.gov> or call 1-800-438-5383 and ask for the “*It’s Not Too Late to Prevent Diabetes*” tip sheet.

Sam Kitching, is director of volunteer services at Northeast Florida State Hospital. As a member of the National Diabetes Education Program’s Small Steps. Big Rewards. Team to Prevent type 2 Diabetes, Kitching is leading by example to let older adults know that that “It’s Not Too Late to Prevent type 2 Diabetes.”