

***“Don’t Treat Me Like I’m Different:”  
A Teenage Girl’s Life with Type 2 Diabetes***



Bethannie Ramirez is like a lot of teenage girls. A junior in high school, she likes hanging out with friends, writing poetry, dancing to punk rock music, and reading Harry Potter. In school, she likes English and history and has dreams of being either an author or psychologist. But Bethannie’s life isn’t always the same as other girls her age—she has type 2 diabetes.



Bethannie found out she had type 2 diabetes when she was in the eighth grade and went to the emergency room because she wasn’t feeling well. She says that being told she had diabetes was “kinda weird,” but that she “wasn’t surprised... I wasn’t taking care of myself.”

Before being told by her doctor that she had type 2 diabetes, Bethannie admits that she was overweight and didn’t eat healthy foods. As part of a Filipino family, Bethannie jokes that it was natural for her to eat foods with a lot of carbohydrates, such as rice. Now, Bethannie has found that in order to manage her diabetes, she has to be a lot more careful about what she eats.

Bethannie learned from a diabetes education class that having type 2 diabetes meant that she would have to make some changes to manage her diabetes and keep her blood glucose (blood sugar) from getting too high. From her doctor’s class, she discovered that blood glucose comes from the food you eat and is also made in the liver and muscles. She learned that blood always has some glucose in it because your body needs it for energy, but if blood glucose gets too high it isn’t healthy, and this was the reason why she hadn’t been feeling well.

“It was hard at first,” Bethannie says about changing her lifestyle and sticking to her doctor’s plan to manage her diabetes. She learned from her doctor how important it was for her to become more active and to make healthy food choices to lose some weight. Bethannie now finds time to exercise and enjoys jogging. But her biggest challenge has been staying away from certain types of food, saying “I miss chocolate a lot.”

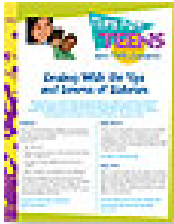
Bethannie also learned how to check her blood glucose the best way for her—every day, every night, and if she ever feels that something isn’t right. It took some time getting used to making changes to manage her diabetes. Now, Bethannie says taking her medications and checking her blood glucose regularly has become just a normal part of her day.

However, Bethannie will be the first to say that she doesn’t want to be treated any differently because of her diabetes. She deals with many of the same problems and issues that every teenage girl faces. She believes that learning to manage her diabetes has made her a much stronger person, saying “don’t treat me like I’m made of glass.”

Instead, her family, friends, and teachers at school have become her support group. Although they sometimes ask her questions to make sure that she is managing her diabetes or whether she

can eat certain types of foods, they otherwise treat her like a normal teenager. “My friends know I don’t want pity.”

What is Bethannie’s advice to other teens with diabetes? She says that if you are a teenager and have just been told by your doctor that you have diabetes, it can be “really hard,” but to “keep sticking to your plan and don’t be afraid to ask questions.” And even if you check your blood glucose regularly, if you feel like something isn’t right, speak up. It’s much easier to accept diabetes and work it into your everyday life than to fight it. “Work with your doctor to make your diabetes plan part of your daily routine,” says Bethannie, “then life doesn’t really seem that different.”



To learn more about type 2 diabetes, visit the National Diabetes Education Program’s (NDEP) website at <http://www.ndep.nih.gov> or call 1-800-438-5383 and check out the [Tips for Kids with Type 2 Diabetes](#) tip sheet series: *What is Diabetes*, *Be Active*, *Stay at a Healthy Weight*, and *Eat Healthy Foods*.

Available in English and Spanish, they provide basic information about type 2 diabetes and ways to be more active, maintain a healthy weight, and make healthy food choices. The NDEP also has a tip sheet for teens, [Dealing With the Ups and Downs of Diabetes](#), which encourages teenagers like Bethannie to feel okay about themselves and their diabetes. It provides tips for reaching out and getting support from others and taking action to manage diabetes for a long and healthy life.

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