

## ONE DAD'S CLIMB TO PREVENT TYPE 2 DIABETES—STEP BY STEP

by Jose Cortez



Nearly ten percent of Hispanic and Latino Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes. And the government estimates that a Latina girl born in 2000 has a 50 percent chance of developing diabetes in her lifetime. This is an alarming statistic—especially considering the fact that Latinos are America's largest and fastest growing minority group. Diabetes threatens the future of our community.

Several years ago, I started taking steps to get healthy. I was 46 years old, feeling out of shape and older than my age. Around this time, I began learning about different health risks prevalent within the Latino community. While doing this research, I learned about the diabetes epidemic and the health risks associated with people in my community and of my age. My wife, a Native American and member of the Pima tribe, told me that 50 percent of her tribe had been diagnosed with diabetes. I realized that not only were my wife and I at risk for type 2 diabetes, but our children were as well. As a father, I am responsible for helping my children understand their risk for type 2 diabetes and for setting an example for them to follow. I started my journey to better health with a commitment to hike a local mountain, Mount Piestewa (formerly Squaw Peak), every morning. An early morning hike is not for everyone, but for me it was a small price to pay for how much better I feel physically and mentally. My wife and kids often hike with me which is a fun way to spend time with each other. We also became increasingly aware of our eating habits and now we are making healthier food choices. Hiking every day changed my life and focused my attention on raising a healthy family.

I am helping my family be aware of their risk for diabetes but it doesn't stop at home. It was important that I share the good news message with my colleagues and help them to know about their risk and what to do about it. I began a workplace health and wellness program to help my colleagues get moving. I used my research about diabetes in our community and my personal experiences with physical activity and eating well to develop the program.

Thanks to the National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) and the "Prevengamos diabetes tipo 2. Paso a Paso." public education campaign, we are spreading the word throughout our community that type 2 diabetes can be prevented. 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 of weight by getting 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week and eating healthy foods in smaller portions. As a father and community leader, I am committed to working with my family and community to let them know that diabetes prevention is powerful, proven, and possible.

Nothing happens overnight. But as a community we can begin to turn back the tide of this epidemic that threatens us if we get moving and start taking small steps today!

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*Jose Cortez, a father of six, is the public relations manager at the community development corporation, Chicanos Por La Causa, in Phoenix. As a member of the National Diabetes Education Program's Small Steps. Big Rewards. Team to Prevent Diabetes, Cortez is leading by example that type 2 diabetes can be prevented in the Hispanic/Latino community. For more information and resources on diabetes prevention contact the NDEP at 1-800-438-5383 or log on to <http://www.ndep.nih.gov>. Materials are available in English and Spanish.*

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