

Diabetes Life Lessons

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 Children with Diabetes*



WHEN LIFE
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After a wonderful, busy week at Friends for Life Orlando, I can't help but reflect on the lessons that living with diabetes for the last 34 years has taught me. Many families and adults living with T1D shared their versions of the lessons living with diabetes has taught them, hoping to ease the burden of others. It can be especially challenging to focus on the positive side of diabetes at times, especially at new onset or during a phase of diabetes distress or burnout. But as Friends for Life reminded me, and I hope it reminds you, too, diabetes teaches valuable lessons that apply to many areas of life.

Lesson 1: Flexibility

If you like clear-cut, consistent rules, diabetes will frustrate you relentlessly. Diabetes has a way of keeping you on your toes at almost all times. This will help teach you flexibility to meet the needs of diabetes. You could be planning to do something that involves a lot of movement and have a low that requires you to treat and wait for it to come up. Or, you could want to have a day of stillness and be higher than you want to be, encouraging you to increase your movement. This willingness to be flexible can be very helpful in day-to-day life when plans change unexpectedly or your child/partner/friend needs something that requires you to pivot.

Lesson 2: Humility and Compassion

Nothing is more humbling than trying to figure out how to adjust glucose levels to the target all the live long day. We have to count the exact grams of carbohydrates, dose the insulin, hope it absorbs properly and then digests properly, and that the amount of activity, stress, and other hormones are all perfectly balanced. Piece of cake, right? Oh, and if there's a lot of fat in the food, like cake, it will delay the absorption. On the positive side, this keeps you very humble because you know you cannot get it right 100% of the time despite your extensive knowledge of diabetes management. It also gives you a unique perspective that people are dealing with things under the surface that others may not realize and allows you to give compassion to yourself, your loved ones, and other people in general.

Lesson 3: Perseverance

Due to the many challenges mentioned previously, and those not listed, you have to keep on keepin' on when you live with diabetes. Depending on your circumstances, this may require a lot of support from others, which is okay! This can help foster a level of perseverance that will benefit you in other aspects of life. Simple things like figuring out a new dinner recipe or why the dryer seems to eat socks (how do so many singles come out!?) may require a level of perseverance others don't yet have. This perspective also allows you to step back and look at the big picture – remembering life and diabetes are a marathon, not a sprint.

Lesson 4: Creative Problem-Solving

Since many variables contribute to glucose levels, people with diabetes learn to approach problem-solving creatively. When you have a high or low glucose that you didn't plan on, you have to think about a lot of aspects of your life to try and determine what happened. It helps to figure out the "why" so that you can adjust your plans, insulin dosing, etc., accordingly. At different times, the insulin regimen you're using suddenly stops working for you, and it may not just be the doses that need to be adjusted. This is where creative problem-solving comes in handy. Maybe you need to start wearing your infusion sets in other locations on your body. Maybe it's time to evaluate how much effort you've been putting into carb counting or pre-bolusing lately. The ability to problem-solve creatively and persistently can help you immensely with parenting, your job, and your relationships.

Lesson 5: Resourcefulness

Similar to creative problem-solving, when you live with diabetes, you have to learn to be resourceful. Inevitably, parts of your diabetes regimen will fail. It could be the insulin itself, which needs to stay within a very tight temperature range, or it won't work properly. It could be how you get insulin into your body – an infusion set, a syringe, etc. Maybe you usually wear a [continuous glucose monitor \(CGM\), which falls off when you're far from home](#) and you are unsure what to do. Whatever the situation, you will have to figure out a way to keep yourself safe, and sometimes, you'll use your creative problem-solving and what you have. You can use band-aids if a device is falling off and you don't have tape or overlays. If your pump clip breaks, there are ways to make a clip with a rubber band and a binder clip.

Lesson 6: It Truly Takes a Village

This is a lesson best learned early on. Diabetes, much like life, cannot be done in isolation. We are not meant to do it alone, either. Learning to ask for help can be hard for some people, but it is crucial. This goes for people with diabetes and their caregivers. I can say that without a doubt, without the support of my family, friends, and friends with diabetes, I would not be as healthy as I am today. If you try to do it all alone, you will likely experience high rates of [diabetes distress](#) or [burnout](#). So, find your people and hold onto them. We all need somebody to lean on sometimes.

I hope that on some days, you can see the brighter side of living with diabetes. It won't be every day, but it will be some days. I know that after attending Friends for Life last week, I don't hate my diabetes. Sure, it sucks most days, and it's a lot of unsatisfying work. But I don't honestly know who I would be without it, and I have lived a life full of support that I now focus on providing to others. And that is a beautiful thing.