

DO NOT LET YOUR DIABETES CONTROL YOU!

Take control!

My name is Jason Girard. I am 26 years old and was diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes at the age of 2. Having the disease, I manage it; it does not control me. I do not label myself as a diabetic. I am not the disease and I do not allow it to control or define me. I am Jason Girard - I have diabetes (a survivor of 24 years) and I control it!

I was diagnosed on November 2 – yes, right after all of Halloween’s sugar! When I was a toddler, I had all the indications of diabetes mellitus. For a few weeks, I had some vomiting, uncontrollable thirst, frequent urination, extreme fatigue, and weight loss from passing kestones through my urine. Being so young (the age of two), all of the early warning signs of diabetes went undetected by my parents. I became so ill that my parents took me to my pediatrician. The doctor examined me and could not make a definite diagnosis from my symptoms, and suspected it was a “just” a virus! Right before we left our office visit, my mother took control and insisted that he do some blood work because she did not believe these I was ill from “just” a virus. I thank God for her relentlessness, because with a simple blood test to determine my glucose level, I was instantly diagnosed with having diabetes! She later told me that she was in denial of her child having a terrible life-threatening disease, and did not want to label me as a Diabetic so she ironically took me out for ice cream to lessen the burden of a life of needles!

Growing up, I had to be responsible for myself in some ways that many adults never experience – a little boy should only be responsible for getting muddy, catching fireflies and pretending he is a cowboy! I did plenty of this, but all while balancing the planes of activity and food. I always felt I was different from other kids; I felt more responsible and in charge of myself because, from a young age, I had to be aware of my body’s needs. My parents had to teach me the importance of knowing when my body required food as a necessity for low blood sugar. A doctor had passed the wisdom to my parents that when my glucose fluctuated – it was simply high or low and not good or bad and we made corrections and adjustments appropriately! I was taught never to get mad at myself if I had high or low blood glucose levels and that they were not a reflection of my character!

Having heard stories my entire life of how difficult it was for my parents to raise me while managing my diabetes; I sympathize with their many challenges. My parents monitored my food intake, checked my blood, & gave painful shots. They had to teach me, while learning themselves what a carbohydrate exchange was, or how a simple sugar quickly raises blood glucose levels. They struggled to find the balance of educating themselves while encouraging and nurturing me. At times, they administered tough love in order to teach me to control my own diabetes. It breaks my heart to imagine how hard it was for them to get their two year old to eat the correct carbohydrate intake and to monitor his blood glucose levels, while balancing activity levels.

As a teenager, I was moody and acted out against my parents. At times, it was hard to know if I was in a bad mood because of internal or external factors. I felt smothered and got angry when they lovingly reminded me to test my blood glucose or suggested I bring a snack when I was going out with friends. There was an unnatural union of diabetes, parent and child. I saw a psychologist and it was determined that I acted out because I was trying to gain control; I was tired of others treating me as a diabetic and I felt restricted by them. It was as if I was a prisoner – my parents were like hovering wardens and I was in a cell of frustration. I was not controlling my diabetes and at the same time my parents were trying to step back as teachers. When they offered me their help, I resented it and my diabetes. I finally recognized that if I regulated my own disease, they would step back! It was time for me to take control and live freely. During this time, my parents and I came to the realization that it was not their diabetes, it was mine! How cool! This was MY diabetes to take care of! They let go of control and let me do it on my own! I was free and not a diabetic; I was Jason Girard who had diabetes.

I have been successful at managing my diabetes myself for many years now and I have not let the disease hold me back from doing the things I really want to do. The unconditional love and support I have received over the years have taught me how to make my own decisions. My amazing fiancée is now experiencing some of the same emotions that my parents once had. She understands she cannot take my disease away from me or enable me by sympathizing. Apart from those around me, much of my success in managing my diabetes has been from the use of an insulin pump. I started using an insulin pump my junior year of high school, when I started controlling my diabetes myself. Right before this, I was on three insulin injections a day. I was terrified of getting an insulin pump because the tubing and the apparatus being attached to me would make me different! When I started on my pump, my Hemoglobin HbA1c was 14 - more than double of what it should be! My Endocrinologist regularly instilled in me the correlation between a high HbA1c and all the complications from diabetes. After the first year of pump therapy, it fell to 7! I have used a pump ever since and my HbA1c has always been under 6.5-7.

To take control, I have had to live an extremely healthy life, stay motivated, and educate myself about this disease. I manage it through exercise, good food choices, and regularly monitoring my blood and an insulin pump, which has enabled me to live a life free of complications for over 24 many years (only 2 years of the 26 years that I have been alive have been without diabetes). My entire life has been complication free! This is an amazing accomplishment!

My pump is truly my best friend! It helps me to live a free of diabetic complications, while living with diabetes for 24 years! However, I control my diabetes; I am not in denial of the complications that can occur from this disease, so I choose to take control. The pump has given me freedom by letting me live an active and healthy lifestyle. With it I can dial in my carbohydrate intake and insulin levels, and it will deliver (or stop) insulin to control my blood glucose on the fly! It provides the customized solution that fits my active lifestyle. I have travelled to Alaska and Puerto Rico, and have gone camping, hiking, and boating on mission trips all with and because of my insulin pump – and now I

will be mountain biking 14 miles with my team the Renegade Riders in the American Diabetes Association's Tour de Cure on June 5th (please support my team and me by pledging at: Main.Diabetes.Org/GoTo/J). This will be my second time riding! My team is made up of my close family & friends. They have all supported and encouraged me to control my diabetes. They understand that they can love and encourage me, but they cannot take the disease away from me.

Along my diabetes journey, I have learned to conquer my disease! I have no restrictions! I do have glucose fluctuations and when the levels are high or low, I move on to the next challenge to conquer! Never get mad at yourself if you fluctuate, because your levels and numbers are not who you are; they should never be a reflection of your character! Some people may think they do not have diabetes, and, in denial, they choose not to control it. Others know they have diabetes and think the complications will never catch up with them, and deny controlling it because some side effects seem so silent. I am thankful I have not fallen into the pitfalls of unrestraint. There are serious and deadly consequences from lack of control. However, when you are in control of your diabetes, it empowers you! Control your diabetes, free yourself, and go live your life! Do not label yourself! If you have the disease, you are not the disease! You are not a diabetic, but you do need to take care of yourself and your disease. Find a support system, family, friends, and doctors who care too! Educate yourself, search for motivation, knowledge and power! Empower yourself! Live your life and enjoy it! Go live a healthy life and control your diabetes. Don't let your diabetes control you!