

Life-altering lessons

LEARNING YOU HAVE DIABETES CAN SPARK SOME POSITIVE CHANGES

It's one thing to learn that nearly 20 million Americans have type 2 diabetes. It's another thing entirely to hear your doctor say you're now one of them.

If that day ever comes, your reaction may mirror that of Gary Williams, 58, a small-business owner who was diagnosed with diabetes three years ago. "I really was surprised," he says. "It was sort of shocking."

In retrospect, he says, he should have seen it coming. His father died of complications from diabetes several years ago, and his brother is being treated for the disease.

And when he thinks back on his symptoms—fatigue, dry mouth, frequent urination, loss of sensation in his fingertips—it all makes sense.

Sudden changes All at once, Williams found himself analyzing what he ate, taking new medications, testing his blood sugar twice a day, and trying to exercise. It was a little overwhelming.

That feeling is common among people newly diagnosed with diabetes. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) says uncertainty, frustration—even fear—are to be expected.

But Williams soon discovered that he didn't need to panic. His doctor and

dietitian were helpful, and his wife and family were supportive.

He also found that making some lifestyle changes was definitely worth the effort.

Eating and diabetes Usually the first question a person newly diagnosed with diabetes asks involves food—what, when, and how much can I eat?

Many people with diabetes assume they'll have to swear off their favorite foods. That's usually not the case, the ADA says. It's more a matter of eating foods in the proper proportions.

Restaurant fare For Williams and many people with diabetes, eating out can present a big challenge.

If you aren't sure how the food is prepared, ask your server before you order, the ADA says. Grilled, broiled, or baked is usually your best choice.

challenged by exercise, one of the key ways to keep blood sugar under control.

The ADA recommends at least 30 minutes of activity most days. For his part, Williams enjoys walking and has joined a gym. And while it isn't always easy to exercise on a busy day, he realizes physical activity is essential.

The right weight Weight loss can also be important. And while many people find losing weight difficult, Williams learned that small changes can make a big difference.

For example, he cut back on starchy carbohydrates. He also stopped drinking two or three sugary sodas a day.

With changes like these, he went from about 220 pounds when he was diagnosed to about 185.

Other weight-loss ideas include serving food on smaller plates, eating low-calorie soup or salad before a main course, and adding fruits or vegetables to every

meal, the ADA says.

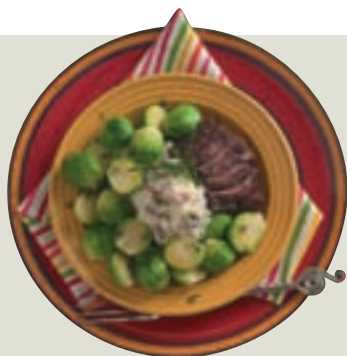
The payoff Learning he had diabetes wasn't the happiest day of his life, Williams says, but the news did motivate him to change his lifestyle.

"I feel better as a result of the changes," he says. "A lot better."

More than 120,000 New Mexicans have diabetes, but only 84,000 know they have it.

And when food is part of a social event, Williams says he follows this simple rule: "Talk a lot. Don't eat very much."

Exercise works While coping with food changes is difficult for many people with diabetes, others are more



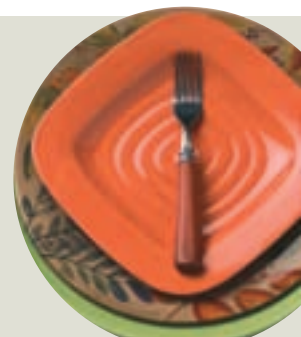
Lesson #1

Think of your dinner as a pie chart:
 ¼ starchy foods
 ¼ protein
 ½ vegetables



Lesson #2

If you aren't sure how the food is prepared, ask your server before you order.





It's not always easy to exercise on a busy day, but physical activity is key to diabetes control.

Living with a person who has diabetes

Finding out that a member of your household has diabetes can be stressful, but by committing to help your loved one manage this disease, you can regain some control and make the situation easier for all involved.

How you can help

Education. The more you know about diabetes, the more helpful you can be. Educate yourself by reading literature provided by the doctor. Visit informative websites such as diabetes.org. This site provides information about the different types of diabetes, includes nutrition and meal planning information, and has a special section for parents and kids.

Communication. Encourage family members to talk about how diabetes is affecting your household. Open communication will help everyone deal with the stress of adjusting to lifestyle changes. Ask the person with diabetes what is most difficult for him or her to handle and how you can help. Discuss why it is important for everyone in your home to be supportive, and solicit ideas on ways each person can help.

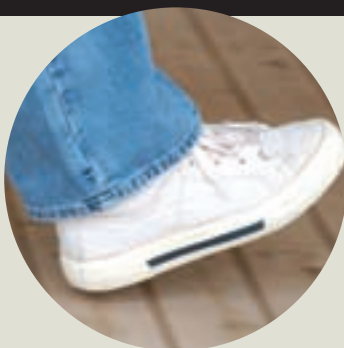
Action. Offer to be an exercise partner. Some people are more successful at sticking to an exercise program if they have someone to exercise with. Also, if you do some or all of the cooking, invest in a cookbook for people with diabetes or look for diabetic-friendly recipes online.

Free cooking classes near you

In New Mexico, the Kitchen Creations program holds free cooking classes for people with diabetes or people cooking for someone with diabetes. For more information, visit diabetesnm.org and select *Kitchen Creations*.

Lesson #3

Use a smaller plate. By doing this, you are less tempted to eat large amounts.



Lesson #4

Aim for at least 30 minutes of daily activity. Walking or swimming are good choices.



Lesson #5

Enjoy a wide variety of fruits or vegetables with every meal.

Sources: American Academy of Family Physicians; American Diabetes Association