

# Margaret Earle: Fulfilling the need for expert advice



Diabetes  
New Zealand

Margaret Earle, diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes nine years ago in 1996, is actively involved in supporting local societies and Diabetes New Zealand. And now, as a special project, she is exploring a practical option for providing people with diabetes with advice on managing their condition.

One of the issues Margaret faced when newly diagnosed was how to manage her diet. 'A problem for me at the start was having to modify my diet. Such a change later in life is a big thing.'

Establishing new habits to manage her diabetes, such as remembering to take her medication, was an essential task for Margaret. 'I use a weekly container for my medication and keep it in the kitchen near my food preparation area so that it jogs my memory. That's not to say that I always remember it though.'

Margaret, who has a hobby farm 25 kilometres out of Warkworth north of Auckland, appreciates the on-going support she receives from others.

'My family and friends are very helpful in providing food I can eat. They take my diet very seriously, often cautioning me if they think I'm going to eat something unsuitable. And my GP takes a regular interest in my progress.'

Diabetes has not put a stop to Margaret's activities. She enjoys walking the dog, taking care of her few remaining farm animals, managing a large garden and travelling overseas. She is also involved in environmental conservation as a member of a land-care group.

Impressed with Diabetes Supplies Limited, Margaret initially joined Diabetes New Zealand as a direct member. She then joined Diabetes Auckland and became a volunteer. Now she is also a member of Diabetes Northland and is on the Executive of Diabetes New Zealand as the Region 1 representative.

There is a real need for a readily available and accessible source of information to help people with diabetes to manage their condition, especially for those who are newly diagnosed.

To assist in meeting this need, Margaret is focusing on enlarging the diabetes information available on the National Healthline (0800 611 116).

Healthline is a free, 24 hour telephone health advice service supported by the Ministry of Health and staffed by registered nurses who use a computer programme to advise callers on the most appropriate course of action for their problems.

Healthline is being rolled out around the country with full nationwide coverage due by June this year.

Margaret reports that Healthline currently includes information on both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, for example, symptom assessment and emergency advice. 'However, there is little on general diabetes management such as advice needed by a newly diagnosed Type 2, who currently may have to wait months before seeing a dietitian.'

Margaret is concentrating on selecting and organising information on day-to-day management of diabetes that could be added to Healthline.

The next step will be to have it vetted by health professionals including dietitians. 'Having this support available on the Healthline 24 hours a day throughout the country will extend the kind of information which telephone volunteers now provide from Diabetes Auckland.'

'With the number of people diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes expected to increase, there will be a greater need in the future for expert advice, especially on diet. It will benefit us all to make sure this advice is readily available.'



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