

Staying on track with lifestyle changes



Diabetes
New Zealand



You'll often hear the expression 'lifestyle changes' when finding out how to manage Type 2 diabetes. **Mihiteria King**, a psychotherapist with a Graduate Diploma in Psychotherapy from AIT/AUT, provides some answers on how to get on track with lifestyle changes - and how to stay on track.

How has diabetes affected you, Mihiteria?

On my father's side, I am Te Rarawa from Waihou and Panguru in the Hokianga and Ngāti Pikiao from Rotoiti. My mother is from Bournemouth, England. There is diabetes on both sides. As my cousin says 'it's not a matter of if you will get diabetes, it's when'. There have been too many deaths in our whānau from poorly managed diabetes resulting from lack of information, motivation or money.

In 2001, I was tested for diabetes after having a urinary tract infection and thrush. I was absolutely shocked when I was diagnosed. I decided to face my fears and attended the Diabetes Auckland education classes. These courses are absolutely brilliant.

How do you manage your diabetes?

Diabetes is an everyday event. You can't just do the right thing on Monday and forget it for the rest of the week. So managing time within an ever-changing environment becomes a prime factor. I have built up my exercise to a 6.5km walk/run that takes 50-60 minutes three to four times a week and about 3.5km on the days in between with one day off for good behaviour.

If I'm attending a hui or going to the marae, I pack my own lunch. One of my aunties chuckles and accuses me of having 'momo Pākehā' (being like New Zealand Europeans with their picnics). But I know I have the right food at the right time. My challenge is dealing with ringawera (cooks) who don't like me bringing my own food.

I don't try to do it on my own. Making lifestyle changes requires intensive support, education and motivation to keep someone on track.

Why is it so difficult to change our lifestyles?

Change is huge and resistance is strong

Practice and consistency over a period of at least 30 repetitions is needed to start shifting your mindset. Changing habits means being willing to put yourself through this, believing the outcome will be worth it and you deserve it.

Low self-esteem This is not a reason for doing nothing. Just know that your life is valuable and get some good professional help from someone who understands about living with diabetes.

Stress of modern life Be willing to learn practical skills to manage yourself more effectively rather than letting your emotions run your life.

Lack of empowerment The only person who has ultimate responsibility for your life is you. Blaming something or someone else will only burn up precious energy. Remember this, we may not be able to control what happens to us but we are in control of how we deal with it.

Developing the skills you need Invest in a group skills programme that focuses on improving how you manage your life more effectively. You deserve it and a life worth living is worth the investment.

How can I get on track with managing my diabetes?

- Education - get on to this straight away, especially the supermarket label reading tours.
- Use all medical and professional appointment options including your annual diabetes check-up.
- Purchase and use a pedometer.

- Assess lifestyle choices - What habits do I have and are they serving me well? How can I increase support or access more?
- Clear out the pantry. Don't leave anything in there to 'use up' or 'just in case'. Don't give it away. If it's no good for you, then it's no good for anyone.
- Stop eating at least one sugar-laden and one fat-laden food that you eat on a regular basis - like fizzy drink and hot chips.
- Make meals instead of buying them, especially lunch. You will save in more ways than one.
- Eat sitting down at a table. Never on the run, especially not in the car. Eat slowly, savouring the flavours and textures. Eat smaller mouthfuls. Use a knife and fork. Point your fork down - don't scoop. Chew well before swallowing. Notice the desire to scoff it down but don't act on it.
- Take a 'whatever it takes' attitude - Am I willing to change? If not, when will I be? What are the risks in leaving it until later? Am I prepared to take those risks?
- Work out the difference between 'I want' and 'I need' and use as a benchmark for decision making.
- Make simple and achievable goals and plans.
- If it doesn't work, talk it over with someone who can give support. It might just be that it does work but it feels really hard.
- Believe in yourself. Just do it.

How can I stay on track?

- Educate yourself about how food and physical activity affect blood glucose.
- Check your blood glucose levels regularly.
- Manage emotions and value yourself.
- Accept situations and minimise stress.
- Learn how to say no to unhealthy food. Walk past, drive past or take another route. Walk instead of drive.
- Experiment with restraining yourself from the need for instant gratification - I can be hungry. I won't starve to death. Make yourself wait until ... Make it a game.
- Start associating negative images to particular food. For takeaways, carve up the amount of butter equal to the fat content and imagine this sliding through your system or pouring it down the sink - it's not that different. Measure out the equivalent teaspoons of sugar in a drink or food item. Picture this each time you consider eating it.

- Wear 'carbolets'. Six red bracelets = six portions of carbohydrate per day. Transfer over from one wrist to the other as you eat.
- Ask for help if you need it rather than struggle alone.
- Have a purpose or reason to live a long and healthy life, making the struggle worth it.
- Celebrate every single little achievement. If you don't, how can you expect others to?



Mihiteria wears 'carbolets'.

Six red bracelets = six portions of carbohydrate per day.

Transfer over from one wrist to the other as you eat.

All the love and care in the world will not help once complications have set in. They are irreversible with no second chance. If you value your life and your role in the lives of your tamariki and mokopuna, you will do whatever it takes to prevent dying from complications of diabetes. Otherwise who will be there to teach your mokopuna how much potential they have?

Mihiteria has worked in hospital based mental health services: Liaison Psychiatry, Māori Mental Health Services and Adult Community Mental Health. She has also been a Lecturer at AUT School of Psychotherapy with particular focus on Māori achievement and bicultural developments.

Currently in private practice in Ellerslie and Birkenhead, Mihiteria specialises in lifestyle change and self-management of diabetes. She is planning a pilot 12 week programme 'Getting on Track' with a follow-up 12-18 month programme 'Staying on Track'. Contact Mihiteria on 09 419 9811 or 027 220 8389, email lifestylechange@mihiteria.com or visit www.mihiteria.com