

Hello diabetes, my new friend

Adrienne McCarthy learned to embrace her diabetes after a brush with death. She made significant lifestyle changes and hopes to inspire others to do the same.



Adrienne didn't grasp the implications for her long-term health when diagnosed 10 years ago. She carried on with her normal lifestyle, not realising this would come back to haunt her years later.

It took Adrienne nearly dying in 2013 for her medical team to review her type 2 diabetes management. Adrienne quickly embraced her "new friend" – the insulin pen, as well as making some lifestyle changes and taking diabetes seriously.

The 57 year old from Wellington, was diagnosed in 2006 while working for the Department of Corrections. Her employer was offering health checks, including a finger prick test for diabetes. To Adrienne's surprise it was sky high.

"I didn't have a clue about diabetes or what it meant in terms of my long-term health. After the diagnosis I was put on half a metformin tablet and I just carried on with my life. I wasn't given a kit to test with."

Adrienne bought a test kit but didn't check her blood sugar levels regularly.

"I didn't realise it was a chronic disease. I just thought it was something I had, like others in my family. I didn't know it could affect your kidneys, liver or eyesight."

Adrienne's dad developed diabetes at 80 and died two years later with diabetes contributing to his death. Aunts, three cousins and her Nana are all type 2.

"My family is riddled with diabetes, it's been surrounding me all my life but nothing clicked. It took me until 2013 before the penny dropped."

Adrienne went to the doctor with a swelling on her chin. She was taking high doses of diabetes medication diabetes and blood tests showed her blood sugars were exceptionally high.

Three days later Adrienne was admitted to hospital with pancreatitis. The specialist removed her gall bladder. But her health problems continued. She nearly died after another pancreatitis attack, the day she was discharged from hospital, and needed four months off work to recover.

The turning point came when Adrienne was prescribed insulin for her diabetes and immediately felt much better. She found injecting less painful than finger prick testing and over time she had more energy and felt less tired.

Adrienne did a six-week diabetes course. It was the first real diabetes education she had had in 10 years.

Injecting with insulin has resulted in more energy, a better quality of life and the desire to raise awareness about diabetes among her work colleagues, friends and especially her daughter and grandson.

She says: "Given our family history, my son, daughter and grandson are at risk. I want to do the right things and lead by example."

Over the past 12 months Adrienne has watched what she eats and used portion control to lose weight. She has done more exercise, using the stairs at work, walking more and practising yoga.

She's been through some tough times but has come through it all and is now feeling good about the future.

Diabetes New Zealand is a leading national organisation and registered charity. Our aim is to support all people affected by diabetes to live well through: Providing information and support to help people take charge of their health • Acting as an advocate and representing all people with, or at risk of developing, diabetes • Raising awareness of diabetes, especially around lifestyle factors that can help prevent or delay type 2 and help manage and control type 1 and type 2.