

Saving my life - Rachel's story

A diagnosis of type 2 diabetes when she was 37 years old saw Rachel Woodrow, from Waikanae, completely changing her lifestyle. She lost a third of her bodyweight, started exercising regularly and is now symptom free.

My doctor and my family had warned me over and over again that I was too big and my lifestyle was killing me.

In 2011 I went to help my sister who had gestational diabetes and was injecting herself and, of course, taking her blood sugar levels. They were quite high so we thought it would be funny to use my readings to surprise her midwife. Well, they certainly did surprise her – they were really high and it took a bit to convince the midwife they came from me.

She took me aside and told me I needed to get help. When my doctor delivered the news that I had diabetes I broke down, not because I was concerned for my health but because everyone had been right and everyone would know. Now I was the one injecting insulin. I told only my family and very close friends.

Through reducing my general food intake I dropped to 87.6kg. My highest weight had been 99kg and I'm only 1.57m. Amazingly (as you often read), after dropping 10 per cent of my body weight I finally got pregnant after 13 years of trying! Of course that meant I had gestational diabetes.

Tabitha was delivered two weeks early. I wish someone had told me what it's like for a baby born to a diabetic mum. She was whisked away less than an hour after a very dramatic birth and so many heel pricks her feet looked like pin cushion.

People with diabetes are given regular checkups with diabetic nurses. My nurse was an extremely lovely woman, but when I tried to discuss reversing diabetes she would just tell me I was doing good. There was an attitude of just accepting my fate. I always felt so down after these meetings and would slip into a depressed state for quite a while.



This led to more eating and less movement – I was in a cycle for getting worse! I couldn't control myself or my eating, I couldn't get motivated and was starting to accept my younger daughter would probably not see me live a long life without ailment.

While I was pregnant I got used to checking my blood sugar levels regularly and it helped me think about what I put in my mouth and started me on the idea of not eating for two hours after a meal (awesome habit to get into by the way).

When I was no longer pregnant, I couldn't get enough test strips to test my bloods all day long. It's not funded, unless you are taking insulin.

I downloaded an app to graph the information and in March 2015, I started really watching what was happening to my bloods.

I have been wearing Fitbits (activity trackers) for years and they are very motivating. I started to watch my blood sugar levels, movement had meaning again. The Fitbit dashboard on my iPhone was amazing and I could easily add food and count calories – all the tools I needed to try out my new plan for getting better.

So on 18 Jan 2015, I brushed off my scales, clicked on my Fitbit, and started to face what needed to be done. The graphs and the green lights when I completed my daily goal were so inspiring! Plus I hated seeing the big red knife and fork when you go over your calories.

This was my ideal jump start to a healthier new life. Now I cannot go to bed without completing my 10,000 steps a day. When I was tracking my food intake, it became apparent that my downfall was chocolate, biscuits and other sweet goodies (baddies) and the calories they took away from real food meant I was eating too much.

As I was stuffing down more junk food one day (standing at the cupboard hating myself) I realised I



Before: Rachel - used to weigh 99 kg and had to inject insulin daily after being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

was addicted to these foods. More research needed. Addictions take 90 days to break but the thought of never having these foods again was very scary so I made myself a deal: 90 days without sugar foods and I could have a “whoop hoo” day. That means eat everything you’ve been craving once every 90 days.

Giving up sugar-filled food was so incredibly hard and I really struggled for a month, but at the end of the 90 days I had lost 7.2kg and felt much more in control!

Now I weigh 62kg and still use the Fitbit app all day/ every day and I like taking part in any online Fitbit challenges. It’s a great motivator.

RACHEL'S TIPS

- > I most often stick to 1,200-1,500 calories a day and most of the food is clean and whole. No one is perfect right?
- > I change the rules regularly – diets lose their shine so I don’t “diet”. I make rules like “no eating after 8.30pm” because after 9pm my willpower has gone to bed and I used to do quite a bit of damage surfing the cupboards at night.
- > I acknowledge and understand that losing weight is 20% exercise and 80% diet. Going for a walk is not going to undo even a small chocolate bar.
- > I play games to make up my steps with everyday activities. For example, putting the washing basket quite a way from the line and walking back and forward to get each item.
- > I regularly document my journey with photos and create comparison photos to remind myself how far I have come.

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.