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# Families find 'new norm' after diabetes diagnosis

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Posted: Friday, August 24, 2012 10:27 am | Updated: 10:41 am, Fri Aug 24, 2012.

Melissa Flores | 1 comment



Lora Schraft/Chief Photographer

On a recent day after school, David Talavera, 11 and his sister, Maya, 12, enjoyed some time at Valley View Park with their family. The twins are active Spring Grove seventh-graders who enjoy participating in triathlons, with Maya also spending time on dance and David active in baseball. They enjoyed strawberries, peanut butter, celery and carrot sticks for an afternoon snack, but they also like to splurge on an ice cream sundae every now and then.

Maya and David, though, have type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune disease that requires them to take insulin to keep their blood sugar from dipping too low or getting too high. Maya was diagnosed when she was 4 years old and David was diagnosed at 9. The two are serving as ambassadors for an upcoming event, along with other kids from around the Bay Area. The nonprofit provides advocacy and research into the disease.

The Talavera family will participate in the JDRF Walk to Cure Diabetes at the Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca on Oct. 20.

"It's fun to have people look up to me," David said. "We get to help organize and raise money so hopefully we can find a cure or help us with type 1."

Added Maya: "I want to tell more people about type 1 and what it is like to deal with it and hopefully find a cure."

Type 1 diabetes is not related to lifestyle habits, such as poor diet or lack of exercise - two of the main factors associated with the increase in type 2 diabetes. Though it used to be known as juvenile diabetes, at least 50 percent of those diagnosed are 18 or older. In type 1, the body attacks some cells of the pancreas that produce insulin, leaving the body without the ability to create its own. Those with type 1 have to take insulin every day to control their blood sugar levels, while those with type 2 can often control their disease with a combination of oral medication, a healthy diet and exercise - with insulin as a last resort.

Experts say the incidence of type 1 diabetes has increased by 3 percent per year for the last eight years, according to Kimberly Chisholm, a member of the executive board of directors for JDRF as vice president of research. Researchers have a few theories about the increase, but more research is needed to determine why it is going up.

Michael Flowers, 12, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes four years ago. A Salinas resident, his family plans to participate in the Laguna Seca race, too.

His favorite part in the walk?

"Hanging out with all the other kids," Flowers said.

His mother remembers it well, when he was first diagnosed.

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## Diabetes Ambassadors

Twins Maya and Davis Talaveras have to carry around these packs wherever they go because they have type 1 diabetes. Inside are glucose tablets, an emergency glucagon shot, test strips, pen needles, glucose meter, lancing device, hand sanitizer, an insulin pen and energy gel.

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"I knew about diabetes," Kelly Flowers-Goulart said. "I rushed him to the hospital and I thought they would bring his blood sugar down and I would go home and make pancakes for him. It didn't sink in that this is for life."

The Talavera parents, Sasha and David, Jr., were at a loss when Maya first started showing symptoms of type 1 diabetes. They did not know that the early symptoms of the disease include extreme thirst and frequent urination. She also had fruity-smelling breath. Some kids may have blurred vision as sugar builds up in the body. Her parents say her blood sugar levels were close to 1,000 when she was diagnosed by her pediatrician, well beyond the target of 125 the family tries to maintain.

Maya was admitted to Lucile Packard Children's Hospital for three days.

"The doctor said, 'This is your new life. This is your new MO,'" Maya's father said. "This is going to be the new norm."

The twins have meters they use to check their blood sugar eight to 12 times a day.

"It's something they have to think about every hour," Sasha said. "We want to avoid

the extreme highs and extreme lows."

### Early days were the hardest

Dad David said it was hard at first when Maya was diagnosed because when the levels got too high, the parents would blame themselves for not managing it better.

"In the earlier days we would beat ourselves up – not knowing really how to control it," their father said. "Some days you check it, and it's 350. You give them insulin and get it down."

Michael has an insulin pump that acts to keep his blood sugar level from fluctuating too much. The twins take four to six injections a day of basal insulin for the same purpose. All three of the kids have to take additional injections of quick-acting insulin to handle the carbohydrates they eat with meals.

"They eat a good balance of vegetables, protein and a little bit of carbs," David, Jr. said, of his kids.

Sasha said her kids can partake in an indulgence from time to time.

"They might have to wait a half hour to bring it down to normal and then they can have a treat," Sasha said. "It takes some patience."

The parents were bombarded with information about the disease itself and also how they would have to treat it carefully when their children were first diagnosed.

"When David was diagnosed we were more in tune," David, Jr. said. "When David was tested, we knew something was wrong."

David, Maya and Michael still remember when they got their diagnosis and they received a bag of "Hope" from JDRF that included a teddy bear and a blood sugar meter. The twins have a bag they carry wherever they go. It looks like a typical cloth lunch box, but inside it has a blood sugar meter, insulin injection pens, a high-glucose drink, glucose tabs and a glucagon hypoglycemia rescue kit for emergency situations where their blood sugar dips dangerously low. Michael has a fanny pack that has all the same supplies he needs when he leaves his house.

"It's not that bad once you get used to it," David said, of checking his blood sugar regularly and taking insulin injections.

Said Maya: "If you really get it, and you take care of your diabetes, you can be a normal kid."

Their parents said being involved with JDRF helped them through the early diagnosis.

"Just have faith and hope," Sasha said. "It will get easier. It is a manageable disease and the kids can have success."

"Know it won't hinder your kids' accomplishments," her husband added.

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Melissa Flores City Editor



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mcbo3 posted at 3:24 pm on Fri, Aug 24, 2012.



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