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Saying goodbye to diabetes and hello to quality of life



Debbie Deausy is beating diabetes and high blood pressure using two simple tools – an exercise bike and the Canada Food Guide.

Deausy's journey started more than two years ago when she made a personal commitment to start losing weight. Since then, she's dropped 150 pounds and now shops anywhere she pleases for a size 8 versus going to specialty shops where she looked for a size 26.

She's the last person to say it's been easy but the first to say it is possible.

"I feel like I've taken charge of my life again," she says. "I feel a sense of accomplishment and I feel so blessed to have the people in my life who have helped and supported me." She credits her brother and sister-in-law, both physicians, and her daughter, a nurse, with providing her with great advice and motivation along the way.

When the journey began, Deausy said she had terrible eating habits and wasn't doing any exercise.

"I often didn't eat breakfast and sometime even skipped lunch but when I got home, I'd eat non-stop and then we'd have supper at 8 p.m. and then I'd be in bed. Deausy is an accountant with the Regina Work Prep Centre. "Now, I eat breakfast, have regular snacks. I probably eat more now than I did before but I eat better.

"Initially, I wasn't sure I could do this. How does a woman over 50 years of age change firmly entrenched eating and sedentary habits? My husband Terry took this journey with me, eating better and at better times. My co-workers, family and friends were incredibly supportive."

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At first, 15 minutes on the exercise bike was all she could manage. Now, she rides one hour, twice a day. She has “bonded” with the exercycle and keeps one inside and one out in good weather so she can exercise and get fresh air at the same time.

“Last May, I was diagnosed with diabetes,” she says. “When you find out you’re diabetic, they tell you that you need to control your blood sugars but they don’t tell you how to do that. I’ve learned that not all diabetics are the same.” For example, she has a colleague who is diabetic whose blood sugar skyrockets if she eats strawberries; Deasy can eat half a cup of strawberries with little to no impact on her blood sugar.

“At first I was overwhelmed. They tell you that when you eat carbs, your body turns them into sugars so I started to cut out carbs and sugars but after a few weeks doing that, I started to feel really weak.”

Deasy sought help and started to learn everything she could about her diagnosis and what foods she could eat and what she should avoid.

“Now, I eat everything on the Canada Food Guide, including carbs,” she says. “I’ve learned to eat carbs with proteins because the protein will slow down the effect of the carbs on the blood sugars.”

After two months of new eating habits and daily exercise, Deasy’s blood sugar levels dropped to normal. She sometimes has trouble with low blood sugar versus high. She is tested every three months and no longer needs to take medication to help control her blood sugar. She’s also no longer taking the high blood pressure medication she had been taking for 10 years.

“Everything is easier now,” she says. “I love my yard; I have a pond and flower beds everywhere. Yesterday, I was moving dirt from point A to point B – I couldn’t do that before. I couldn’t climb stairs without hanging onto both bannisters. If the curb was too high on the street, I walked around to the wheelchair ramp to get onto the sidewalk. It’s little things – it’s all quality of life.

“I love to cook and to bake, make fancy meals with rich dessert and now I’m discovering new recipes which are a lot of fun.” Pizza, a family favourite family, is still on the menu after Deasy discovered a cauliflower-based pizza crust recipe. “At first, my family said ‘Ewww!’ I told them, just try it and if you don’t like it, that’s OK. Now they prefer it.”

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Deasy's next goal is to start to build back some of the muscle mass she knows she's lost with the weight. She hopes her success has inspired friends and family. In fact, her son has started eating more healthy foods, going to the gym alongside his partner and they're both seeing significant results in terms of weight loss. "I've experienced the kind of change that I wish I could share with others," she says. "I hope my story can inspire others. This really is possible and it's possible to do it in a healthy way."

"I've experienced the kind of change that I never thought was possible. People have said to me 'I don't know how you did it, I wish I could.'"

Deasy says she believes anyone can make a positive change one step at a time.

"As I began losing weight little by little, everything became less of an effort. I was able to do many things that at one time I thought I would never do again. Once again I enjoy going for walks and shopping for clothes."

When Deasy was first asked about sharing her story, she was hesitant.

"It makes me a little uncomfortable to talk about myself but my hope is that if anyone is struggling with any of the issues I have had, my story can give them the encouragement to try to make a difference in their life. This really is possible to do and you can do it in a healthy way."

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