

When a young woman is diagnosed with diabetes, she learns...

# “You Can’t Be Afraid To Try”

By Missy Foy



*Each year, 1.5 million Americans learn that they have diabetes. It’s a scary diagnosis—and after the initial shock comes the question: How will my life change? Here’s one story of hope.*

I’VE ALWAYS BEEN ATHLETIC, but one day 10 years ago, I became so sick after a run that I could not move. My husband, Bob, found me lying on the bathroom floor. Tests in the emergency room found something serious: My blood-sugar level was dangerously high. I thought it was a lab error. When the ER doctor told me I had type 1 diabetes, I could not stop crying. The idea of having a disease that wouldn’t go away scared me.

The first few months were horrible. *This should not be happening to me*, I thought. *This happens to children and young adults*. I was 33—too old, I assumed, to get type 1 diabetes. I learned that my case was not unusual. Then I realized how incredibly traumatic it must be for parents who have a child—or for a teen—who is diagnosed with diabetes.

At the time, I was working as a researcher at the VA Medical Center in Durham, N.C., so I knew the risks that diabetics faced—blindness, kidney and heart failure—but I always felt that I would figure things out.

I had just started running marathons professionally, and I worried that my dream of winning

## Take Control Of Diabetes

About 21 million Americans have diabetes, a life-threatening condition in which the body is unable to properly use insulin, the hormone that helps power our cells. There are two types: Type 2 diabetes, the more prevalent form, is usually controlled by drugs, meal planning and exercise. Type 1 diabetes requires insulin, because the immune system has destroyed the cells that control blood sugar. Here are some recent developments in treatment:

- **Insulin-delivery systems now can provide a steady, 24-hour release of insulin without the need for repeated injections.**
- **Weight-loss surgery is helping control diabetes in some type 2 patients.**
- **A small number of patients have been cured of type 1 diabetes after receiving transplants of human insulin-producing islet cells.**
- **Researchers are trying to use embryonic and adult stem cells to create cells that produce insulin.**

a national title might never happen. For a year, doctors kept telling me that I would never race at the level I wanted. That was devastating. But diabetes does not make you less capable: I knew that if I

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could learn how to run a marathon, other diabetics wouldn’t be afraid to try. Still, when I began running again, I was terrified of passing out.

Because I’m a diabetic, I can’t do *anything* on the spur of the moment. Before each marathon, I do a series of practice runs to time exactly when I’ll need to eat and take insulin. I snack on a chocolate chip cookie that I bake with wheat flour and oatmeal—then I remove my insulin pump and take off, monitoring my blood sugar and swallowing packs of carbohydrate gel to replace calories.

In 2000, I was the first diabetic athlete to qualify for the U.S. Olympic marathon trials. In 2005, I ranked 10th in the world for 50-mile marathons. And just in September, I came in second in the U.S. national championships.

Now I’m finishing my Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, researching diabetes care among minorities. I also visit children’s diabetes camps and go to conferences. “Don’t be afraid,” I say to those I meet. “Start with baby steps. Dream big—and then dream bigger.”