

A Letter To The Newly Diagnosed Me

Five years old, a stale hospital room, strangers poking me with syringes and placing IV's, mom and dad are crying. All I know is the hospital-grade cup with ice water has never tasted so good. Someone mentions I have severe hyperglycemia elevated around 650 mg/dL. I was just learning what the value of numbers were in kindergarten, how am I supposed to know what mg/dL means?

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Type 1 Diabetes is an invisible autoimmune disease; no cause, no cure (yet). One that has no end in sight but will bring you capabilities you could've never imagined. From insulin pump changes in bathroom stalls at school, and the thousands of injections you will do, somehow this disease is the single most influential and, excuse my language, most badass thing about who you will become. You will learn to read a syringe before you learn how to read a book. You will have nights that keep you up to sounds of hyper/hypoglycemia, but don't let those words daunt you. You will learn the ability to fall back asleep instantly (you'll appreciate that, 50 year old self). Some days it will feel like you just came off the battlefield that your ancestors fought on, but then you realize those are the moments that build stronger adaptations for next time. Over your lifetime you might face yourself saying, "Why me?", and then you realize you were given this challenge because you are the one capable of making it your superpower.

As you begin to comprehend what being "diagnosed" means, this disease creates more complexity, yet positively influences how you will interact with the world. Numerical data and metrics will become your subconscious to monitor yourself internally, but it will also help you understand the world around you. As you pursue a career in the field of scientific research within the medical realm, your understanding of your pancreas will enable you to better understand the patients and families you encounter. You will learn to treasure the health you have, no matter if some of your Beta cells died.

Every burden or extra challenge this disease contributes will teach you that even though you thought your furthest potential was that running one mile which took a whole bag of brown sugar and only repetitive laps around the block. You will learn to adapt to make trail running over 8 miles in the woods achievable. Hint: flat Coca Cola, Mike and Ikes, Nasal Glucagon, and a border collie with a bright orange vest to carry your supplies.

Each day is a new challenge to overcome, but you will find comfort in the sounds of hospital monitors and reality TV in medical waiting rooms. From being a young girl, you will learn to immerse yourself in medical encyclopedias and complete anatomical puzzles to glue to your bedroom wall. You might find yourself skimming research papers on medical examinations of the rarest diseases, to the innovative treatment plans for the most prevalent cases. When you finally achieve that goal of being in the hospital, but not as a patient, during volunteering in the Intensive Care Unit you will learn to explore that curiosity. Words like "hypoxia" or

“pneumothorax” initially might have no meaning, similarly to how hyper/hypoglycemia didn’t, yet your curiosity is an endless source of progression to expand your knowledge. Additionally, you will help those in dire medical need by becoming Blood Drive Coordinator for the local American Red Cross chapter to organize the gathering of over 100 pints of blood, and potentially save hundreds of lives. You will realize that passion turns past dreams into new realities, embrace that.

So even though some days will be filled with frustration and a lack of hope, just remember the moment you are currently in. Find peace in your 32 oz bottle of ice water, and maintain the pursuit of understanding complex medical terminology. Even though your skin might be bruised and scarred, remember those robotic-looking devices attached to your body make you pretty badass.