

WINTER 2018 ISSUE 10

# HealthMatters

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## WHAT IS DIABETES?

UNDERSTANDING DIABETES

TWO

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS**

**FOUR**

LIVING WITH DIABETES

SIX

**PRIMARY OBJECTIVE**

**EIGHT**

PrimaryCare  
**Networks**  
CALGARY AND AREA

# ▶ Your *Health Matters*

Health Matters is published by Calgary and area Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to give you information about the programs, services and health teams available to you through your family doctor. PCNs in the Calgary area were established about 10 years ago to provide people with health services and programs through their family physicians.

Today, PCNs work with teams of other health professional as well as offer programs such as Prescription to Get Active and Find-a-Doctor.

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Cover photo of Darcy Graham and Charles Voll by Trudie Lee Harder

We appreciate your feedback and article suggestions. Contact our editorial team at [communications@mypcn.ca](mailto:communications@mypcn.ca).

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**Dr. Jane Ballantine, the medical director of the Calgary West Central Primary Care Network, takes a special interest in helping diabetes patients manage the disease.**

Diabetes is common in Canada, yet few of us know much about it. This chronic disease robs the body of its ability to control blood sugar (glucose) levels, either because it cannot produce insulin or cannot properly use the insulin it produces. Without insulin, sugar builds up in the blood instead of being used as energy. Over time, this damages organs, blood vessels and nerves.

A report by Diabetes Canada in 2015 found the number of people with diabetes more than doubled between 2000 and 2015 to an estimated 8.9 per cent (3.34 million) of Canadians, leading to \$3 billion in direct healthcare costs. Some one

million Canadians have diabetes and don't know it.

Even more people are at risk of developing diabetes. In the next 10 years, both the rate and healthcare costs of diabetes are projected to grow by more than 40 per cent.

Anyone can get diabetes, but not everyone will and for many people, diabetes can be prevented.

## **Types of diabetes**

With Type 1 diabetes, the pancreas loses its ability to make insulin and this is life-threatening. "Essentially, the pancreas doesn't work so Type 1 must be treated with insulin," says

**Diabetes can be prevented & treated**

# Diabetes:

## understanding the disease

WRITTEN BY COLLEEN SETO

PHOTO BY TRUDIE LEE HARDER

Dr. Jane Ballantine, the medical director for the Calgary West Central Primary Care Network. She has a special interest in diabetes.

About five per cent of people with diabetes have Type 1, which generally develops in childhood or adolescence.

Type 2 diabetes is far more common and occurs when the body can't properly use the insulin it produces (called insulin resistance) or makes less insulin than the body needs. Type 2 diabetes usually develops in adults, but can also affect children. Being overweight or having obesity are two major risk factors for developing this kind of diabetes.

"Its incidence also increases with increasing patient age," Dr. Ballantine adds.

Type 2 diabetes can often be managed through physical activity and meal planning; if the disease is more severe, it may also require medication, including insulin, to control blood sugar.

A third form of diabetes is gestational diabetes, a temporary condition that can occur during pregnancy.

Many people also have prediabetes, which is higher than normal blood sugar levels, but not high enough to be diagnosed as Type 2 diabetes. The condition increases the risk of developing Type 2, although the disease can be prevented, or at the very least delayed, with healthy eating and active living.

"A loss of five to 10 per cent of body weight can go a long way to helping manage diabetes as well as many other health conditions," says Dr. Ballantine.

### The risks

Living with diabetes involves constantly trying to keep blood sugar levels stable. It can be difficult: stress, eating habits, physical activity and the amount of insulin administered all affect blood sugar levels.

Both high and low blood sugar levels can lead to serious and even life-threatening complications. These include heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, blindness and nerve damage leading to amputation. Diabetes can also contribute to depression and anxiety.

High blood pressure, high cholesterol and excess fat around the waist pose additional risks for diabetes. Risk factors are also higher in some populations, such as Indigenous peoples.

### Your medical home

If you have or want to determine any risk factors, or wish to be screened for diabetes, your PCN healthcare team is ready to support you. Talk with your doctor about detecting diabetes, especially if you're age 40 or older.

Your PCN can offer customized resources to help you develop a healthy diet and active routine. The focus is on making a plan that works for you. Better still, your PCN team can help you avoid diabetes altogether.

When properly managed, diabetes won't stand in your way to a full and healthy life.

All PCNs and Alberta Health Services have programs to support for chronic disease management including diabetes. Many community pharmacists also have additional knowledge about diabetes.



# Signs and symptoms of diabetes

Clues your body gives about diabetes

WRITTEN BY COLLEEN SETO

More than one million Canadians have diabetes and don't know it.

That's because, for many, diabetes gives no clues or symptoms.

If you're 40 or over, the best way to detect diabetes is to discuss your health and possible risk factors with your healthcare provider. Together, you may also consider getting screened for diabetes even if you display none of the signs of the disease. These include:

- Unusual thirst
- Frequent urination
- Weight change (gain or loss)
- Extreme fatigue or lack of energy
- Blurred vision
- Frequent or recurring infections
- Cuts and bruises that are slow to heal
- Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet
- Trouble getting or maintaining an erection.

If you do have any of these symptoms, contact your healthcare provider.

## Diabetes in children

Type 1 diabetes usually develops in childhood between the ages of 10 and 14. Why children get it is unknown: most children living with diabetes have no family history of the disease. In 2015, about 3,800 children in Alberta had Type 1 diabetes.

Knowing the symptoms, particularly if your child is drinking, urinating and sleeping more than usual, can help with an early diagnosis.

"Most kids will experience a few days to a week of changes in the way they pee," says Dr. Neil Cooper, a Calgary pediatrician. "They may have accidents, get up at night to pee, and have to pee a lot at school. By the end of the week, parents notice something is wrong, and take them to the doctor." The key is to have your child tested right away.

When a child is diagnosed with diabetes, a healthcare team works with their whole family to manage the disease. And children are encouraged to take part in their diabetes care right from the start. Even young children can choose which finger to test, and read numbers on the meter. When diabetes is well managed, children can have good health their entire lives.

More than one million Canadians have diabetes and don't know it.

# Diabetes support through your Primary Care Network

WRITTEN BY MELISSA LIGERTWOOD

Each Primary Care Network (PCN) in the Calgary Zone offers help for adults living with or at risk for diabetes.

## Your medical home team

PCN clinicians work with you long-term to help you best reach your health goals. Clinicians answer your questions one-on-one, and connect you with other people who can help you, such as:

- Family physicians
- Certified diabetes educators
- Health management nurses (including weight and chronic disease management)
- Dietitians
- Clinical pharmacists
- Kinesiologists
- Exercise specialists
- Behavioural health consultants
- Community support workers
- Social workers
- Mental health therapists
- Patient care coordinators.

## Your medical home

A diagnosis of diabetes can be a lot to understand, but we can help you to manage it. PCN clinicians provide a range of supportive health management services. You'll be cared for close to home by a healthcare team that understands your needs.

## Screening and coordination

Patient care coordinators help keep your health on track. They review your medical history, make sure your health records are up to date, and help arrange care with everyone on your healthcare team.

## Nutrition and lifestyle

PCNs offer classes, workshops and one-on-one sessions for you to ask questions, learn new plans of action and feel supported as you set your health goals.

## Foot care

Enhanced education around foot care is an important part of managing your diabetes. Nerve damage can lead to numbness in the feet, making you less aware of foot injuries and ulcers.

## Blood sugar and insulin management

PCN clinicians guide you through checking your blood sugar, responding to sugar highs and lows, and how to maintain your blood sugar level.

PCNs also offer plans and education for insulin management. Learning about insulin injections, testing and injection equipment, as well as the risks associated with low blood sugar will help you set up a healthy daily routine.

Your PCN team cares about you and your well-being. We're here to help you reach your health goals. Visit [mypcn.ca](http://mypcn.ca).



# Living (and thriving) with diabetes

Two people, two types, two experiences

**WRITTEN BY MELISSA LIGERTWOOD**

**PHOTOS BY TRUDIE LEE HARDER**

Managing diabetes is personal, and success can come in many forms.

Darcy Graham and Charles Voll are two of thousands of patients receiving care through the Mosaic Primary Care Network's (MPCN's) diabetes program. With the help of a specialized team, both men are learning to better manage their chronic disease.

Diagnosed with Type 1 at the age of 27, Graham is something of an anomaly.

That's because Type 1 diabetes is commonly diagnosed in childhood or adolescence. So when a family friend suggested he seek medical advice for excessive thirst and urination, Graham had no idea it might be diabetes. "I never had any serious health concerns growing up. The diagnosis was a complete shock," he says.

Graham admits he felt a lack of urgency and interest in a lifestyle change at the time. He visited his doctor intermittently at best. What he didn't realize was that his blood sugars were spinning out of control.

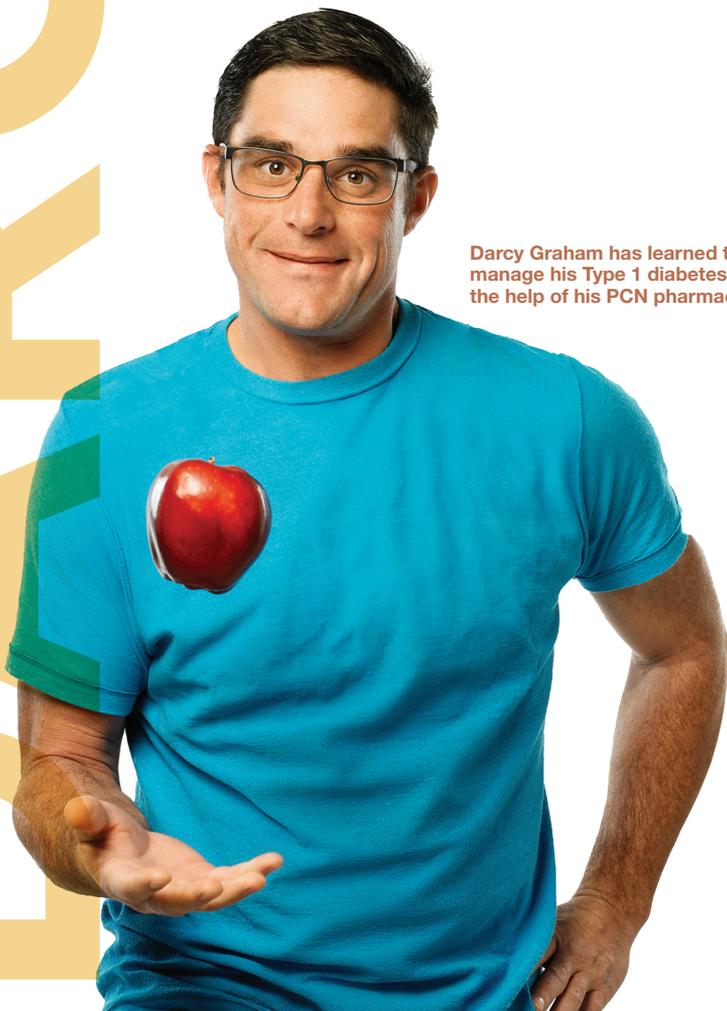
"I was eating whatever I wanted and never checking my blood sugars. I was guessing on my insulin doses. I just didn't care," he says.

Then Graham began seeing Jackie Liu, MPCN's primary healthcare team lead and clinical pharmacist, in the summer of 2017. Now 39, Graham's outlook and self-management of his health have changed.

"Jackie is more than my pharmacist. He understands that being a diabetic isn't black and white," Graham says. "We're working to figure things out together, at my pace."

Graham's blood sugar is now stabilized and he's making lifestyle changes to improve his health. He checks his blood sugar five times a day and calculates his insulin dose based on food intake. He's also planning meals and shopping to keep more fresh fruits and vegetables on hand.

"I meet with Jackie every week, and he's connected me with a lot of other resources—a dietitian, an optometrist, and even counselling. I've done a 180-degree turn since coming to Mosaic. I can't thank Jackie enough," Graham says.



**Darcy Graham has learned to better manage his Type 1 diabetes with the help of his PCN pharmacist.**

Managing diabetes often calls for compassion and creativity. No two people with diabetes are alike.

Like Graham, Voll also takes insulin and is working with Liu to manage his health.

Voll, who's 64, has a complex medical history. He's known for years he was at risk for diabetes. His family has a history of Type 2 diabetes that reaches back at least three generations. "My grandmother had diabetes, and she didn't manage it very well. I remember she was always in the hospital. She probably didn't know what to do to stay healthy," Voll says. "I know more about diabetes and what to do. It's still hard for me to change, but I'm trying."

A long-haul truck driver by trade, his biggest challenge is healthy eating.

"I stay away from alcohol and I try to keep active, but when you're on the road, it's hard to eat healthy. Fast food is an easy option," Voll says.

He was referred to MPCN in 2015 after tests during a brief hospital stay showed extremely high blood sugar levels. Liu helped Voll control his blood sugar levels with medication, manage his insulin and change how he eats.

Voll says he never used to eat much during the day, but now he understands the importance of eating three or four times a day to keep his blood sugar stable.

Liu's goal is to help patients overcome their challenges, which sometimes means meeting in the middle.

"Patients respond differently to the demands of diabetes management. It's not our job to make demands and judgments," Liu says. "We try to give patients the best knowledge, tools and information so they can make the best decisions for their own health, and ultimately, learn to self-manage their conditions."

**Through his PCN, Charles Voll knows now that eating regularly and taking insulin helps to control his blood sugar.**



# Primary Objective

WRITTEN BY COLLEEN SETO

PHOTO BY NEIL ZELLER

**Name:** Stephanie Drebit, 55

**Health condition:** Diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in spring 2017.

**Health goal:** Bring blood sugar down along with my weight—without diabetes medication.

**How I feel now:** I knew I had to really make changes to avoid medication. Marleis explained my diabetes to me. I loved my bread, my sweets, and my coffee liqueur, but it was time to say: “party over.”

I love that my doctor’s office offered this service. I’ve just really turned my health around. I lost 25 pounds and got my blood sugar way down in four months. I feel wonderful!

**Working together:** I helped Stephanie understand what the diagnosis meant to her health, and how diet and lifestyle changes would help. We’d talk about what she’s eating and how to read nutrition labels and shop at the grocery store. We also talked about what is healthy and what isn’t for someone with diabetes.

I’m so proud of the hard work Stephanie did. She didn’t have to go on medication. I still see Stephanie regularly to motivate her, keep her on track, and answer questions. Providing ongoing support is a very important role the PCN plays.

— Marleis Garvin, registered nurse and certified weight management specialist, Calgary West Central Primary Care Network

