

Molly's story



I was about 40 years old when I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. It came as a complete surprise. I was the right weight for my height. I was really active – a downhill skier. I swam 35 laps in the pool, and I coached high school girls' basketball. I ran before running was popular.

At age 35, I was pregnant with twins. It was a high-risk pregnancy as I was on 18 heart medications daily and lost one of the baby girls. I am happy to say that I did have a healthy daughter who is 45 years old now, and she has two children, so I am a doting grandmother.

When diagnosed with diabetes, I was in denial. I was a Vice President of Marketing for a large Alaska seafood processing company. I thought I was invincible because I was so active thinking nothing could be wrong with me, so I didn't pay any attention to the advice I was given by my doctors and dietitians.

Diabetes runs in my family. my grandmother had a leg amputation due to uncontrolled diabetes. My mother, my sister and my brother also have diabetes. My mother, concerned about my health, insisted that I go with her to attend a talk by Dr. Irl Hirsh on diabetes at the University of Washington. I have been under the expert guidance of Dr. Hirsch for about 34 years.

In 2002, I had two major emergency surgeries, and developed sepsis. I kept telling the nurses I knew how to take my own insulin and Dr. Hirsch confirmed this with the staff.

As Dr. Hirsch's patient, I slowly overcame my denial and learned how to manage my diabetes. It took me a while to get back on track with my blood sugars. What helped me is that I started teaching diabetes classes to the community. Dori Khakpour, RDN, a dietitian from the diabetes clinic was the nutrition speaker for the classes. Dori was a diabetes dietitian, plus she had done a rotation at the Northwest Kidney Centers, so she knew a lot about kidney diets as well. She was two dietitians in one! I got my UW doctors to give talks at these classes. Dr. Hirsh came and gave a talk. A lot of people attended my classes and changed their lifestyles as a result. Many of the wives whose husbands attended the classes sent notes of appreciation that their husbands were back on track with their diabetes management.

As my kidney disease became more prevalent, Dr. Hirsch referred me to the Nephrology Clinic at the UW, where I saw Dr. Anderson. He was very strict about blood pressure readings. I remember attending a short class about my diabetic kidney diet. Dori was my dietitian, and I knew the diet basically from

listening to Dori. She was a big help to me as I learned about sodium from her. I was on the UW Patient and Family Advisory Board, and Dr. Hirsch recommended that I be on the Kidney Research Institute Patient Advisory Board because I was always researching things about my health.

For the last 10 years I have vacillated between stage 3 and stage 4 kidney failure. My GFR goes up and down, so does my creatinine. My GFR is 38 now. My creatine was 1.8, but now it is 1.3. I eat less sodium now; I try to keep my sodium below 2,000mg, but most days it is below 1,400 mg. I never use salt. I cook from scratch.

If I could give advice to people with diabetes and kidney disease, first, I would tell the dietitians, "Realize that being a diabetic is very difficult. It takes constant attention, and it is very hard to stay on track all the time."

To patients, I would say, "It's so important to learn about your disease. Don't be fearful! Dive in and learn everything you can about what you've got! Knowledge is power! Pay attention to what the doctor and dietitian tell you so you can live a long life. NEVER, EVER, EVER, GIVE UP! Don't deny your diabetes, work with your doctor and dietitian to keep your hemoglobin A1C at desired levels so as not to develop severe complications or kidney failure."

I think it also helped me to help others, because by helping others I forgot about myself. I have been a diabetic for 40 years, and now at almost 80 years, I have learned that positivity is the key to longevity.