

# “I lost 100 lbs—and took charge of type 2!”

After living for years as a type 2 diabetes denier, Mary Van Doorn put the brakes on excuses. Today, she's a fitness instructor, businesswoman and role model to her family—and thousands of others around the world. —BY KAREN KLEIMANN

**W**ellness guru. Fitness dominator. Diabetes challenger. Full-time inspirer. Mary Van Doorn, 41, is at the top of her game and not about to slow down. The Dacula, GA, resident is a busy wife and mom of two, balancing her dual career as a fitness instructor and diabetes coach to others living with the disease: “I understand their struggles because I’m still living with the challenges of managing diabetes,” Mary says. “I’m a diabetes diva now and showing type 2 who’s boss!”

Hard to believe that not so long ago, Mary didn’t want to even acknowledge the existence of her type 2 diabetes.

## “I was in denial”

At the young age of 21, Mary was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Although she had a strong family history of it, she hadn’t planned on

a life with diabetes. While she tried to remember to take her prescribed medication, she stopped there, slipping into a state of denial about it.

“I did it all wrong,” she says. “I didn’t test my blood sugar, hardly took my medication and didn’t exercise. When you’re young you think you’re invincible until you find out you aren’t.”

That day came in 2013, when she found herself too tired to play with her then 2-year-old daughter. “I was 290 pounds and exhausted all the time,” Mary says. Convinced that her weight—not diabetes—was the issue, Mary started counting calories, doing Zumba and running and nearly lost 100 pounds! But while she was enjoying her slimmer figure and renewed energy, her diet remained largely unchanged.

## “I wasn’t taking care of my whole body”

By 2015, despite being active, Mary

*“Though I was improving my outside appearance, I wasn’t taking care of my insides.”*



PHOTOS BY BONNIE HEATH

“I now have more energy to do the things I love, especially play with my kids,” says Mary Van Doorn, pictured here with her daughter Aly.

had regained 30 pounds—and was feeling awful. She wasn’t checking her blood sugar or taking her medication properly and avoided her doctor until the tingling and pain in her feet started and she finally consulted her endocrinologist. Her test results showed why: Her A1C was 10.9 and her fasting blood sugar was more than 250! What’s worse, her cholesterol was sky high.

“My doctor was worried I was going to have a heart attack,” Mary recalls. “Though I was improving my outside appearance, I wasn’t taking care of my insides.”

Determined to set a good example for her family, Mary prioritized her health by regularly taking her medication—two oral medications, insulin at night and a weekly injection of a GLP-1 agonist. She also ditched high-carb favorites for low-carb versions heavy on the veggies.

## “I’m now rocking it”

Today, Mary is a changed woman. She’s 100 pounds lighter again, eats a diabetes-friendly, low-carb diet, tracks her blood sugar levels and takes her medications faithfully. To date, she’s racked up four half-marathon medals (hanging on her wall!) and competed in one triathlon! But the biggest triumph has been in reducing her A1C—now 6.8—and finally getting a handle on her diabetes.

In 2016 Mary felt inspired to create Sugar Mama Strong ([sugarmamastrong.com](http://sugarmamastrong.com)), in which she focuses on helping people with diabetes achieve their wellness goals. The Facebook group now has 3,800 members worldwide and stresses encouragement and positivity.

“I wanted to help people who were struggling the way I was,” Mary says. “It’s been so rewarding. I love seeing people change their lives.”

## “You can be a diabetes thriver!”

Once Mary ditched the lifestyle that was holding her back from managing her blood sugar, she never felt better. Here, she shares some strategies that keep her on track. See if they can help you, too!



**Be intentional about your mindset.** “It starts with you. If you don’t have a can-do attitude, you’ll get frustrated and may be tempted to throw in the towel. I start each morning reading 10 minutes of a book I really enjoy. It sets me up for a positive day. In my experience your body won’t achieve what your mind doesn’t believe, so take a chance at believing you can—and you might be surprised by the result.”

**Communicate your goals.** “I told everyone around me what I needed in order to reach my weight loss and blood sugar goals. That included not having certain foods in the house, like candy and baked

goods; setting aside time for myself to exercise; and following a special meal plan.”

**Find a meal plan that works for you.** “For me it’s eating low-carb but do whatever will help you stick with a healthy diet in the long term. I often tell people to ‘stay in their lane,’ meaning give your nutritional plan time to work and don’t get sidetracked by someone else’s diet results.”

**Be patient.** “Everyone is different and some people get results faster, but that doesn’t mean to give up if it’s not happening as quickly as you’d like. Every positive action you make is a positive change inside you, even if you can’t immediately see it in the numbers. Eventually, though, the positives will catch up to you.”

**Join a support group.** “Just make sure it’s one that is positive and encouraging about managing diabetes. We’re hard enough on ourselves, we need to support each other in every way possible.” 