

[DEPARTMENT]  
**WELLNESS**

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Elizabeth McIntyre (left) became a force in the fight to find a cure for type 1 diabetes as a volunteer for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation after her daughter, Kailey, was diagnosed with the chronic disease at age 9. Kailey, now a freshman at Providence Academy, is coping with the challenges the disease presents to growing teens, and Elizabeth is leading a local support group for parents of children with type 1.

## Not the Typical Teen Type (1)

Battling diabetes brings local kids and parents together.



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WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A TEENAGER, sporadic highs and lows come with the territory. But for a group of teens in Maple Grove, that territory can be dangerous ground when those highs and lows refer to blood glucose levels.

Type 1 diabetes is a chronic disease in which a person's immune system attacks their insulin-producing cells. Insulin basically turns sugar into energy. To break down carbohydrates, type 1 diabetics must inject insulin, manually through either a needle several times a day or through a pump they wear attached to their

body. The danger with manual insulin is if there's too much in the bloodstream, low blood sugar can cause a person to feel weak, lose consciousness or worse. Thus a balancing act must be maintained between the highs and lows with the right dosage of insulin and sugar in the bloodstream.

"Unfortunately, what worked one day isn't always what works the next with diabetes," says Elizabeth McIntyre, support leader for type 1 diabetes with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. McIntyre started volunteering with JDRF when her now 14-year-old

daughter, Kailey, was diagnosed with type 1 at age 9. "Kailey's need for insulin, like our need for oxygen, can change at a moment's notice—and in the teen years, the exception becomes the rule even more often."

McIntyre is JDRF's family network chairperson for the Minn-Dakota chapter who leads a support group for parents of type 1 diabetics in Maple Grove. Attendance at these meetings isn't a problem. While one in 500 people under the age of 20 in the United States has type 1 diabetes, that ratio is a bit skewed when looking at a rare sample of teens in Maple Grove.

#### A Built-in Support System

Erica Haff, diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at age 7, was one of five seventh-graders who came to MGJH with type 1 diabetes in 2010, and one of nine in the school by the end of the school year.

Diabetes isn't contagious. And contrary to what some of Erica's classmates have

thought, it wasn't caused by eating too much sugar or lack of exercise, which can be the case for type 2 diabetes. The cause of type 1, once better known as "juvenile diabetes," is unknown.

Erica is now part of a type 1 diabetes support group at MGJH, while her mother Carol attends McIntyre's parent group. Shannon Coughlin, another member of the parent group, remembers the fear that struck her when her daughter Meghan was diagnosed with type 1 at age 7: "All of the sudden you have this daily 24/7 responsibility, and if you get it wrong, you're potentially putting your child in danger."

For the kids, the support group is a place to be around others who are going through the same thing. "You just feel like you're not alone," says Meghan Coughlin.

#### Kids Will be Kids

Nathan Yasosky, an eighth-grader at MGJH, plays basketball, baseball and soc-

cer. He doesn't let type 1 diabetes stop him from anything, but some incidents are beyond his control.

"When my blood glucose is too high or too low, I don't feel well and can't play my best," says Nathan, who had to sit out a game this summer due to high blood sugar.

The daily school routine can be a little different for a type 1 diabetic as well. "Other kids don't have to ask the teacher in the middle of class to go to their locker to check their blood sugar and drink a juice box [when low]," says Kailey.

Unless a cure is found, there are no days off from type 1 diabetes for Kailey, Erica, Meghan and Nathan. But like most teenagers, they focus on managing their highs and lows, instead of getting managed by them.

"Kids just want to be kids, diabetes or not," Elizabeth says. "They want to have fun, and they love to be active. We as parents need to keep our fears and emotions in check to help them be the best they can be."//

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