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The Secret Thoughts of a Mom with Diabetes

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The *Secret Thoughts* OF A MOM WITH DIABETES

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The magic of motherhood is indescribable. Early on, there is a quiet moment that you share with only you and your growing baby in the womb. This moment is a realization of the greater things to come, and the awe-inspiring realization that your body is creating another living being who will forever change the world around you.

There are the simple pleasures of cuddling a little one who is completely reliant on you to guide them to the best things life has to offer. There are the sloppy kisses from a toddler who hasn't yet realized that love is something most of us experience only in moderation. There is the emotional send off to the first day of school, helping your child to learn both easy and hard lessons, and the drying of tender tears when times get hard for the both of you.

Each moment being a mother is unique and special. My experience as a mother has been wonderful. I have been humbled, I have been awed, and I have experienced unspeakable joy. However, I have also had my moments of despair, many of which are associated with my life with type 1 diabetes (T1D).

Since I was diagnosed in 1993, I have talked openly and honestly about my life with diabetes. Diabetes during motherhood is a challenge that is difficult to articulate, and raises questions that even I do not have all of the answers to. How do you describe the heartache of your infant developing thrush because she breastfed while your blood sugar was high? What are the words to convey the fear of dramatic low blood sugars that my child has had to

save me from, and the guilt and heartbreak that follows as she looks into my eyes and stays by my side to make sure that I am okay? How do I build a dam to hold back the anger that I have at diabetes for forcing my daughter to grow up faster than other children her same age? For this mom, it is heartbreaking, and it causes pain for both of us.

I am so grateful for the gift of this child, yet I am saddened at how diabetes affects the way we function as a unit. It is unfair to have to apologize to your child for acting in a harsh way because of how a high or low blood sugar was affecting you. I wish my daughter didn't have to deal with the low blood sugar temper or the high blood sugar moodiness that comes with my life with diabetes. I wish my daughter didn't have to worry about my longevity. I wish my daughter didn't have to undergo testing to determine if she is at risk for diabetes, and quietly absorb the fear associated with that possibility. Most of all, I wish all of this wasn't the everyday reality of life with a daughter and as a mother with diabetes.

I often wonder what the experience of diabetes will mean for my daughter's life choices. Will she gravitate toward a profession of helping people, or will she choose to limit the burden of responsibility that she takes on from others? The answer is not yet clear. Most of our career discussions are about saving animals, becoming a singer, and other typical nine year old interests.

I also wonder how diabetes will continue to play a role in our lives. Will we experience more pain, such as the time that I broke my foot in a low blood sugar fall at home? Or will we glide through life with little worry, relegating diabetes to the back seat, and allowing no argument out of it as we go our own way? Only time will tell, but I imagine reality exists somewhere between the extremes.

We talk about diabetes a lot. Before she was even two years old, we had a plan for how to help Mommy. If asked, she will recite specific instructions in the event of a diabetes emergency: "Get Mommy a juice box, call Grandpa, and then call 911."

We also talk about hope. We believe in better and we work together to find better in life with diabetes for our family and others. The search for better is what truly defines us, in every situation. I never expected my child to become my biggest diabetes cheerleader, but having her on my team makes all the difference in the world, and I'm so thankful she is a part of this journey.

As we both get older, I know that my daughter's role as a T1D supporter and caregiver will expand over time. There will be times that she will need more support for herself, beyond just that which I can provide for her. I can't help but wonder how she will find and receive that support, and what my role will be as we continue to grow together.

Thankfully, my daughter perceives the diabetes community as a safe place of love, support, and understanding – and she is right. She also sees the importance of people binding together and lending their strength to one another when they are in pain – and she is right again. As a parent, my greatest wish is for my child to find inspiration and to bring good to this world. Diabetes provides no shortage of opportunities for her to see examples of people doing great, awe-inspiring, magical things to make this world a better place. This mom is grateful for the examples, and the gift of an amazing child who can appreciate all of the lessons and opportunities for growth and compassion that diabetes provides. ■■

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