



# Highway Diabetes Centre Newsletter

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Greetings to everyone,

The Highway Diabetes Centre is expanding and very soon will be moving to its new premises. More photos of the building will follow soon. This month we would like to introduce a very exciting new member of our team. Tarryn Vieira is a psychologist who will be coming to address our “Shape Up” class next week Tuesday morning and starting consulting in April. She will form a vital role in terms of offering support to all our patients and their families. This month she writes on “Living your best life with Diabetes”

## **D-Day**

I’m sure that many of you remember the day that diabetes became part of your life. It may have been the day that you, your child, or spouse was diagnosed. While each person’s experience of that day and the journey that follows is different; for many people a diagnosis of diabetes can be overwhelming and stressful. Suddenly they are faced with a chronic illness as well as an overload of information on how to cope with it. Life now revolves around a regime of injections or medication, dietary restrictions, counting carbohydrates, anticipating sugar dips and spikes, frequent doctor’s appointments, as well as a host of other changes to their daily habits and lifestyle.

## **Treating the Whole Person**

Thanks to medical advances and education around diabetes, people have been given more control over their **physical** health by being able to get their blood sugar to the required levels and make the necessary lifestyle changes. Diabetes is now a manageable part of a person’s life rather than a label that defines their identity. In treating diabetes it is important to realize that this chronic disease affects the whole person, not just their body. Diabetes can also have significant effects on our **mind, emotions, and ultimately on our relationships**. In order to manage diabetes effectively, it is essential that we take care of our mental health as well as our physical health. Let’s take a look at what this means and how you can take back control of your body, mind and relationships.

## **Healthy Choices Equal a Healthy Life**

For many people the reality of a chronic diabetic future is really frightening. People choose to deal with this in many different ways. For many, avoidance or denial of our feelings and of the diagnosis is often encountered. This is particularly true for people who feel healthy and are not experiencing noticeable symptoms. Facing and accepting the diagnosis initially rather than waiting for our symptoms to become severe, allows us to avoid longer term damage to our bodies. These symptoms, if left unchecked, can become overwhelming as well as physically and emotionally debilitating. Feeling stuck at the point of diagnosis can really disarm us and make us feel powerless. During this time it is often advisable to talk to



healthcare professionals who are able assist us in acknowledging and accepting our feelings, and making quality decisions about our health that will give us the best chance at a long and happy future.

### **Stress Busting**

Making sure that we manage our stress levels is another essential part of keeping our mind and body healthy. Feeling stressed simply means feeling as though we don't have the mental, physical, or emotional capacity to cope with the demands of our current situation. This may be caused by the sudden upheaval of our lives, conflict in our family or relationships, or work pressures. When we are under stress our body sends out signals to produce stress hormones. The presence of these hormones in our body causes our liver to produce more glucose. For diabetics, this extra blood sugar can have serious health effects. This means that if stress can be managed, blood sugar levels can be better controlled.

Making the necessary lifestyle changes to stay healthy may seem logical and easy to do. Changing our eating habits, exercising regularly, or trying to lose weight can however be an incredibly daunting and frustrating task for many of us. The seeming impossibility of this journey can often make us feel anxious, helpless and even guilty when our symptoms worsen. In addition, the constant pressure and responsibility of making healthy lifestyle choices and monitoring blood sugar levels can take its toll. This may leave you or your family members feeling frustrated, hopeless and burnt out. People with diabetes are also twice as likely to develop depression as those without diabetes. Symptoms of depression such as feelings of hopelessness and fatigue can cause people to engage in unhealthy behaviours such as over or under eating, and not taking medication. Studies have shown that when depression is treated, both mood and blood glucose levels improve. Furthermore, people who accept and come to terms with their feelings and diagnosis are better able to care for themselves and to keep blood glucose levels stable. So pay attention to how you are feeling. Emotions influence our thinking and subconsciously we move towards what we focus on. This means that a healthy mind leads to healthy behaviour, and ultimately, to a healthy body.



### **Take Action**

Stress does not have to be dealt with alone. Studies have found that the support of others around us not only helps us to adjust to a diagnosis or lifestyle changes, but can also improve our mood and buffer stress. So talk to those you trust about your worries. Taking time out to recharge by doing things that bring you joy and help you to relax are also important stress relievers. At times, your stress may be completely overwhelming despite attempts at managing your stress. This is when professional involvement is often helpful.

Often on a journey of chronic illness the most vital ingredient to ongoing health is a positive mind. If you find this increasingly difficult to maintain or just feel that you need a few 'handles' or coping mechanisms, please feel free to come and chat to me about how we can help you to not only cope with diabetes but thrive and enjoy your life!

Wishing you health and happiness  
Tarryn Vieira

