

## Commentary: There's no time out for Type 1

By Gabrielle Brits for The Campbell Reporter San Jose Mercury News

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I'm a mom of a Type 1 diabetic.

If you had asked me eight years ago how I would feel about this statement, I would have been indifferent as I knew next to nothing about this disease. That is, until the day my 3-year-old son Austin was diagnosed.

It was a very scary day, with an ambulance ride, an emergency room visit and a multitude of specialists. After just a three-day recovery, we were sent home equipped with a few days of training and many fears about the future and managing life with this disease. I focused on arming myself and Austin with as much information regarding daily management of Type 1 diabetes, various support groups and what is being done to find a cure.

According to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, every year 15,000 children and 15,000 adults are diagnosed with T1D in the United States. That translates to about 80 people every day, a staggering statistic.

Symptoms for Type 1 diabetes can often come on quickly and can include: extreme thirst, frequent urination, drowsiness or lethargic, sudden vision changes, sudden weight loss, and labored breathing.

Managing Type 1 diabetes is an intensive, daily task and includes multiple blood sugar checks, counting carbohydrates and taking insulin to balance both the carbohydrate intake as well as the blood sugar control. This is a daily challenge that all people with T1D must learn to balance, which is never easy, especially for children.

Austin must make powerful decisions every day that affect his health, from the amount of insulin he takes through his insulin pump to the number of carbohydrates he consumes at each meal or snack, and even how much exercise he gets can affect the blood sugar levels in the body.

As a young child, Austin became a wiz at mathematical formulas. He paid close attention to the meter's blood glucose reading, carbs calculated and insulin needed based upon this giant scale. As he got older, he took more responsibility in the daily management of his diabetes, and now he can check his own blood sugars, calculate carbohydrates he's eaten and take the appropriate ratio of insulin based upon his pump's recommendation. He has learned to be quite diligent about regularly monitoring his blood sugars and watching for signs of hypoglycemia or hyperglycemia.

As a mother, it is very hard to watch a child have to learn about such tough life consequences so early. Austin has had to learn that in order to live a healthy and active life, he must be mindful of the foods he consumes, the number of times he checks his blood sugars and how much activity he's participating in. There are good days and there are bad days, and we've learned as a family to accept that and to work as a team to continue to work hard at it and stay focused.

Diabetes has changed not only Austin's life but our whole family's. We are committed to supporting Austin not only in his daily management of diabetes but in working together to become strong advocates for a

cure and raising awareness of Type 1 diabetes. Since Austin was first diagnosed, we have participated in the Walk for Diabetes, raising thousands of dollars to help aid in finding a cure, and served on the walk committee which helps put the event on.

Austin serves as a volunteer with the JDRF as a youth advocate and mentor, speaking to children in the Bay Area who have been newly diagnosed and talking to them about daily life with diabetes, participating in sports and how they can still live a happy, healthy life with diabetes so long as they work hard at keeping their blood sugars in control.

Recently, Austin was selected as a delegate for the 2013 Children's Congress in Washington D.C. this July. The event brings together approximately 150 children from ages 4 to 17 from all over the United States. They serve as delegates, speaking with members of Congress and the White House administration to seek continued funding of the Special Diabetes Program for diabetes research. There has been significant progress in finding new treatments for diabetes due to renewed funding for the SDP.

Finding a cure or having something such as the artificial pancreas, a device that is already being tested in clinical trials, would be truly life changing. As a parent of a T1D, it's a constant state of fear of sudden drops or spikes of blood sugar, and I feel terrible when I have to change the infusion site of the pump with a large needle--something he has to do every three days. We still, after eight years, cannot sleep through the night without checking his blood sugar levels.

Austin truly believes in living each day with a positive attitude and doesn't let diabetes control his life. His positive attitude and continued perseverance toward creating awareness and sharing his story helps remind us all that if we work together, we can find a cure for Type 1 diabetes.

He hopes that when he travels to Washington D.C. that he will get to share this message with his congressional representatives and help make an impact on the world by finding a cure for diabetes.

And as a mom, I couldn't be more proud.

Gabrielle Brits is a Campbell resident. For more information on the Children's Congress, visit [cc.jdrf.org](http://cc.jdrf.org).