

Invisible Disease

My Daughter, the Type 1 Diabetes Warrior

Blanca Chavez

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Think about the different ways you can use the word *hit*. I *hit* the ball with a baseball bat. I got *hit* with a large bill. I got *hit* hard by the flu.
2. What do you think a “Type 1 Diabetes warrior” is? Read the box on p. 35 for more on diabetes.

We Got Hit

In 2020 when the Coronavirus hit the world, another disease hit my daughter.

My daughter Megan was only 11 years old when she was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. She almost died that year because her body collapsed with something called *diabetic ketoacidosis*. She was in intensive care for a week. It was very painful. We didn’t know anything about this disease. We thought it was our fault because we thought “diabetes” was related to a poor diet.

However, Type 1 Diabetes is not related to lifestyle. It is an *autoimmune disease*. The immune system attacks cells in the pancreas, and then the pancreas doesn’t produce enough insulin. The body needs insulin to process sugar. We needed to learn so much information in a short time. We had to learn how to check the sugar level in her blood and then give her the right amount of insulin. We felt overwhelmed and devastated. I wondered how I didn’t notice that my daughter was sick. But diabetes can be invisible.

Supporting Our Warrior Daughter in School

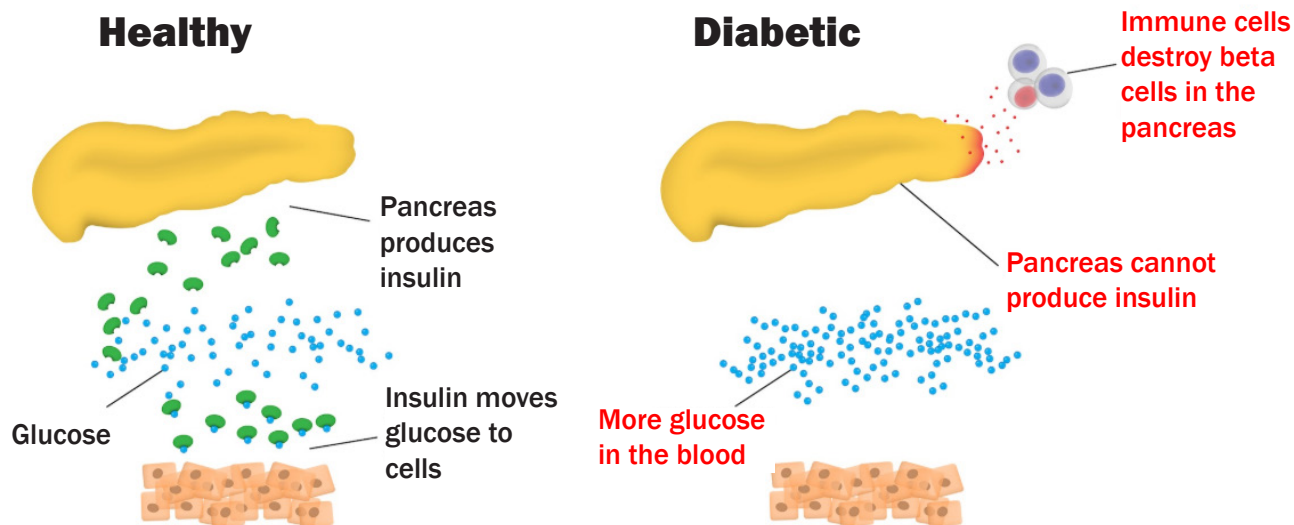
To navigate this disease, we didn’t just learn about how to manage it with medicine. We also had to learn how to support our daughter in school. We noticed that her teachers didn’t know



too much about this disease. Fortunately, our doctor told us she could get a *504 Plan*. This is a document that describes the accommodations and modifications a school should provide to a student with disabilities.

We met with teachers and the nurse to create a plan that fits my daughter’s needs. Now they know how to handle any emergency. They know that sugar highs and sugar lows can come in any moment. She needs to go to the nurse to check her sugar, and then she might need a snack or a dose of insulin. If her sugar is too high or too low, she can fall into a diabetic coma and die. She also needs to drink water and go to the bathroom

Type 1 Diabetes



Type 1 Diabetes is an autoimmune disorder. People usually get it when they are children. An autoimmune disorder is when your immune system attacks your body instead of defending it. Your pancreas makes insulin to help you process sugar in your blood. If you don't make enough insulin, the sugar stays in your blood instead of getting absorbed into your body, and you get high blood sugar, or diabetes. Diabetes can be treated with medication and diet and lifestyle changes. Type 2 Diabetes is not an autoimmune disorder. It develops slowly over time. It happens when your body doesn't use insulin properly, so your blood sugar levels go up.

Sources: <https://www.myhealthexplained.com/diabetes-information/diabetes-articles/type-1-diabetes-prevention> and <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/7104-diabetes>

whenever she needs to. This disease is so unreal because in one moment you can see Megan playing around and in the next second, she can die if she doesn't monitor her sugar levels.

Going to school with an invisible disease makes Megan feel vulnerable. She has to deal with the sugar lows and the highs, she needs more time to complete tasks, and she has to deal with bullies. She told me she feels like she is *walking on a tightrope* all the time. This struggle has made my daughter Megan into a Type 1 Diabetes warrior. She has overcome all her limitations, and next year she will graduate from high school.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look up *diabetic ketoacidosis*, *autoimmune disease*, and *504 Plan* and learn about them.
2. According to the author, what makes her daughter a warrior?
3. How did the author advocate for her daughter at school?
4. Have you ever had to advocate for your child at school? Describe it.

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