

A new attitude about diabetes

Discovering an inner diva could help women take on diabetes.

by Karen Giles-Smith

Father boa workouts, makeovers, massages, glamour photos, glitzy t-shirts with sayings like “Denial’s Not My Style!” and “Anything Sugar Can Do, I Can Do Better”...these are the accoutrements of Max Szadek and his mega-mission to encourage women with diabetes to treat themselves like queens. Dealing with diabetes can be overwhelming, but Szadek helps women realize they have what it takes to take it on: Szadek helps women discover their inner diva.

In 2004, Szadek founded Divabetic (divabetic.org), a national nonprofit organization that employs a team of diabetes care experts and provides complimentary outreach programs to engage, uplift, educate and empower women who are at risk for or have diabetes. The programs include a traveling show called “Divabetic: Makeover Your Diabetes” sponsored by Novo Nordisk, a company specializing in diabetes care and other pharmaceutical products.

DIVA stands for disciplined, informed, visible and active. The Divabetic program adds pizzazz to diabetes education and speaks to women on an emotional level, making the messages meaningful and memorable. One of Szadek’s messages is that managing diabetes is difficult, but doable with support.

“Diabetes is a chronic condition—there are ups and downs every day,” says Szadek. “It’s important to stay motivated and avoid burnout.” Creating an entourage is one way. “The Divabetic program brings women with diabetes together so



Max Szadek leads the Divabetic “boalicious” workout at the 2009 American Diabetes Association Expo in Detroit.



Max Szadek discusses how to dine like a diva. Photos by Mitch Smith.

they no longer feel alone,” says Szadek. “And family members who attend walk away with a better understanding of diabetes—they feel differently about the disease and are more likely to get involved.”

Szadek also encourages women to take care of themselves and their diabetes. “Often, women don’t give themselves top priority,” says Szadek. “The program gives women a boost of confidence and renews their spirit so they can take on diabetes another day—it provides community, education and resources to help.” In addition to the various Divabetic programs, Novo Nordisk offers personalized diabetes information and resources on their website, changingdiabetes-us.com, such as success stories, customized care plans and menu planning tools. “The most impor-

tant aspect of diabetes care is to connect with health care professionals and build a team to help manage medical care,” says Terri Seidman, Associate Director of the American Diabetes Association office in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. “There’s a lot to it: Knowing what to eat, how to be physically active, how to monitor blood sugar—lots of numbers.”

Seidman recommends The American Diabetes Association website, diabetes.org, as an excellent resource. People can search for local physicians who specialize in diabetes and certified diabetes educators (CDE). The website also houses resources for those at risk of diabetes. “Preventing or delaying the onset of diabetes—that’s the goal.”

“Knowledge is power,” says Seidman, “You need to be your own advocate to get the help and support you need.” Seidman believes that pampering is power, too. As a diabetic for 40 years, she knows how much it helps when she makes room for herself. “It’s important to feel good inside and out.”

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What is Diabetes?

While eating, some food is broken down into sugar (also called glucose). Sugar travels in the blood to all body cells. Insulin, a hormone made by the pancreas, helps sugar move from the blood into body cells.

With diabetes, the pancreas either doesn’t make any insulin or it doesn’t make enough insulin, or the body prevents insulin from working right. As a result, sugar can’t get into body cells and stays in the blood, raising the blood sugar level.

Diabetes is a serious public health issue affecting an estimated 9.7 million women. Although there are genetic components, no one knows what causes diabetes. Eating and activity choices can play a role in blood sugar control. It’s essential for people living with diabetes and their families to incorporate healthier habits to reduce the risk of developing serious diabetes-related complications such as blindness, heart and blood vessel disease, stroke, kidney failure, amputation and nerve damage.

Source: Changing Life with Diabetes, ChangingDiabetes-us.org