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Diabetes fails to stop Cumbrian fell runner

Posted on Monday 2nd July 2012

When 40-year old fellrunner Bob Barnby was failing to hit his time targets, and began feeling continually thirsty and lacking in energy he made an appointment with his GP where he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

However, 23 years on Bob still enjoys competitive running, taking part in orienteering challenges every weekend and has just returned from a two-week cycling holiday in France.

Bob, now 62 said: "Being diagnosed with diabetes doesn't prevent you from doing anything - you just have to plan and think ahead."

Diabetes UK North West is to work with the NHS in Cumbria to raise awareness of diabetes across the county through Cumbria Diabetes Awareness Month.

Currently, almost 23,000 people live with diabetes across Cumbria and a further 11,000 have the condition but do not know it - however there are ways to manage the condition.

Bob said: "I was very fit at the time I was diagnosed. I was in training and I noticed very early on that there was something wrong.

"My diabetes wasn't caused by my lifestyle. I took plenty of regular exercise and ate healthily. However continuing my healthy lifestyle has helped me improve the way I respond to the insulin. I take very little in comparison to others.

"I was 40 years old when I was diagnosed, a common age I am told to develop Type 1 diabetes. Because I am very good with numbers and had a good understanding of dietary needs through my fitness training, I found it easy to work out what I needed to eat - though when I go out running or cycling it is essential that I always have enough food with me so my blood sugar levels don't fall.

"It can be a weight penalty, carry a large bag of flap jack on a cycle run, but it is what I need to do.

"Though the doctors can provide you with the tools and information to manage your diabetes, the only person who can manage the condition is yourself. Once you have been diagnosed you need to take the advice given and act on it.

"I found the DAFNE programme very useful. I was on the second programme held in Cumbria in 2005. Though I had been diabetic for sometime before attending the programme, it was very educational and did make a difference to me in my own self management."

DAFNE is a programme which aims to improve education for people with Type 1 diabetes and support self management. For people with Type 2 diabetes there is the DESMOND family of courses.

Diabetes is a long-term condition caused by too much glucose, a type of sugar, in the blood and there are two main forms Type 1 and Type 2.

Type 1 diabetes occurs because your body cannot produce insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is needed to control the amount of glucose, a type of sugar, in your blood.

When you eat, your digestive system breaks down food and passes its nutrients into your bloodstream. Normally, insulin is produced by your pancreas to take any glucose out of your blood and move it into your cells, where it is broken down to produce energy. However, if you have type 1 diabetes, there is no insulin to move glucose out of your bloodstream and into your cells.

The exact cause of type 1 diabetes is not fully understood, although in most cases it is believed to be an autoimmune condition. Type 1 diabetes usually runs in families, so there may also be a genetic cause for the autoimmune reaction. If you have a close relative, such as a parent or brother or sister with type 1 diabetes, you have about a 6 per cent chance of developing the condition. The risk for people who do not have a close relative with type 1 diabetes is approximately 0.4 per cent.

Most adults who have diabetes in the UK have Type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body becomes resistant to insulin and as a result, the body's own insulin is unable to function properly. Type 2 diabetes is often associated with obesity and a sedentary lifestyle. Type 2 diabetes can be initially controlled with dietary and lifestyle changes, but as type 2 diabetes is a progressive condition, medication (including insulin) may need to be prescribed.

A new programme aiming to prevent people developing Type 2 diabetes has recently been made available in Cumbria. "Walking away" is a three hour structured education programme, developed within the NHS by DESMOND national programme. It is delivered in groups of up to 10 people, who may be accompanied by a partner, family member or friend) by trained educators in a variety of community venues. The programme has been shown to demonstrate a 30-60 per cent reduction in the risk of progression to Type 2 diabetes in high risk individuals.

Dr Robert Westgate, GP Lead with Cumbria Diabetes said: "Walking Away is an evidence based intervention which provides a very real opportunity to support people at high risk of developing Type 2 diabetes to change their behaviour and in some, prevent their progression to type 2 diabetes."

People can be referred to the Walking Away programme by their GP or practice nurse.

Cumbria Diabetes Awareness Month concludes with a Healthy Lifestyle Road show in Carlisle on July 10-11. Full details are available at www.diabetes.org.uk or call 01925 653281.

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