

D-Day (diabetes diagnosis day)

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“So, you want to make sure your son doesn’t have diabetes?” the nurse at the medical clinic asked skeptically.

In retrospect, it was pretty obvious, but at the time we tried to explain everything away as normal. When Zack, our 4-year-old, stood in the shower guzzling water, we convinced ourselves it was because he’d just been exercising and was thirsty. When we heard him race across the floor to pee only 1 hour after going to bed, we blamed ourselves for not taking him there beforehand. During the day when, in his rush, he would miss the toilet all together, he was simply caught up in play and ignoring the cues.

I remember seeing his rib cage more pronounced when he dressed himself, and finding it odd when jeans that once fit him well were now gaping at the waist. We both missed his weight loss. As well, I recall his ravenous appetite and heavy fatigue, but thought it was normal for an energetic little boy who had run hard all day.

When he lied about drinking his sister’s entire water bottle, I finally took him to the clinic.

The nurse looked at me questioningly and, for a moment, I felt foolish. But she gave him a plastic cup and showed us to the bathroom. After we submitted the sample, we were placed in an examining room.

I held my son and prayed.

The skeptical look was gone, however, when the nurse re-entered the room. With eyes wide as saucers, she flattened herself against the wall and mouthed the words so that my son could not hear. "There's a lot of sugar."

"He has it?" I asked. She nodded.

My heart sank.

I started to cry and Zack, sensing something was wrong, followed suit. It was then Zack received his first finger poke. It was like torture for him, my needle-phobic little guy. The glucometer simply read "HI" (I found out later this meant his blood glucose was over 33 mmol/L). The doctor appeared with a hand-written letter and told us BC Children's Hospital emergency department was expecting us.

That was over 2 years ago.

Today, Zack has a hard time remembering life before diabetes. But he knows he is different. Despite his amazing cooperation and our best efforts, the endless finger pokes, site and sensor insertions, insulin boluses, carb counting, treatment of lows, night time checks--the pain and continual interruptions can become too much for him and he breaks down. It has its toll on us too.

When he was diagnosed, he was mere months away from entering full day kindergarten. Would he be safe? Who would take care of him? What if he had a diabetic emergency and there was nobody who could help? These were the questions keeping us awake at night.

When we discovered schools would not administer insulin or treat severe low blood glucose, we were shocked and terrified. How does a 5-year-old manage diabetes when he can't read, do math, or problem solve, and these are requirements of care? We wondered if we would ever be able to send him to school, when school personnel informed us that should Zack be severely hypoglycemic and seizing they would check his blood glucose and call the ambulance, but would not give him an injection that could save his life.

There is a need for change in BC school policy. For more information, read our upcoming article featured in BCMJ's June 2012 issue: "Unsafe at School: Advocating for children with type 1 diabetes."

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