

journey of HOPE

Written by Kelly Isenberger
Photos by Kenzie delaTorre



Amber's family constantly surrounds her with support and encouragement

A Katy Family Copes With Type 1 Diabetes

“This has been a *life changing experience* for all of us. You have one child with diabetes, and your whole family has diabetes,” says John Paul Torres, a Katy resident and dad to Amber, who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes last year. Type 1 diabetes, previously known as juvenile diabetes, typically begins in childhood and can have devastating effects if not managed properly. According to Diabetes America, “About one in every 400 to 600 children and adolescents has type 1 diabetes. It is the second most prevalent chronic disease of childhood after asthma.” Amber, a second grader at Katy ISD’s Nottingham Elementary School was diagnosed at 5 years old. Amber’s dad, mom Gemma, and her two brothers, Jake and Tristan, both 9 years old, constantly surround her with tremendous support and encouragement. Her family’s experience was at first frightening and overwhelming, but they’ve learned how to manage Amber’s disease, and now she’s a strong, happy little girl.



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Our bodies normally break down food and produce glucose, which then fuels the body's cells with energy. In someone with diabetes, a hormone that is key to this process, called insulin, is lacking. The result can be hyperglycemia, or too much glucose in the body. When this occurs, the body begins to break down fat for energy and causes acids called ketones to be produced. Large amounts of ketones in a child's body are very serious and can be poisonous. A problem with taking insulin, however, is hypoglycemia, or low blood glucose. A child can become unconscious or experience seizures as a result. Tight monitoring and control of blood glucose and insulin levels are critical in a child with type 1 diabetes.

Warning Signs

Gemma and John Paul tell a story of terror when they realized that there was something seriously wrong with their little girl. "I looked down at her body, and that was exactly when I knew that there was something really wrong with her because she looked like a skeleton," recalls Gemma. Amber had been urinating excessively and became lethargic. That night, Amber's parents took her to the emergency room. They admitted her to the intensive care, and what they found out was that Amber was very sick and had type 1 diabetes. Common warning signs of diabetes are urinating often, constant thirst, extreme hunger, and weight loss.

Gemma recalls those dark days, "I was bombarded with numbers and calculations, and then we were sent home. I was so overwhelmed with it, but then the reality sinks in. After all of that we just got real positive about it. It's now just a part of what she does." Her family began to learn everything they could about diabetes and made the changes that diabetes demands.

Managing Diabetes

Life with diabetes means counting carbohydrates, testing blood glucose levels, and giving insulin injection shots. Amber can't eat without first testing her blood glucose levels. Previously, Amber would need an insulin shot twice a day, but in January, Amber received a pump that she wears under her clothes. After testing her blood glucose, she calculates the amount of carbohydrates she will eat, and then the pump will give her the right amount of insulin into a cannula site under the skin. Factors that can alter her

She's a normal little girl. She just has diabetes.
We wouldn't let her think any less than that.

-John Torres, Amber's father



Diabetes management includes counting carbs, testing blood glucose levels, and giving insulin shots



Before administering Amber's new pump, the family prays together



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The Torres family enjoys some quality time playing Pictionary



Amber's family is sure to treat her just like any other young girl without a disease

Type 1 Diabetes Symptoms

If your child is exhibiting **any** of these symptoms, make an appointment with your pediatrician **immediately**.

- Frequent urination
- Unusual thirst
- Extreme hunger
- Unusual weight loss
- Extreme fatigue
- Irritability

It Takes a Village

A child with diabetes needs a network of support, including doctors, school professionals, family, and friends. The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation believes that, "All students with type 1 diabetes need a strong support network at school to help them properly manage their type 1 diabetes on a daily basis."

"Cultivating good relationships with school staff is key," Gemma agrees. "She has had a lot of support. The school has been really wonderful." The Torreses rave about Katy ISD, particularly Nottingham Elementary School. The school nurse at Nottingham, Mary Lou McClung, has been instrumental in ensuring the health of Amber and also allowing her the freedom to go to school. John says of Nurse McClung, "She loves Amber, and that gives us a lot of peace. She understands this disease."

Learning to Trust

Amber's family has had to put a lot of trust in the school system. In fact, when Amber received a pump last January, her teacher and the school nurse asked to be a part of Amber's pump orientation so they would know how to care for her. When asked about her cooperation with Amber's family, Nurse McClung says, "We have a great relationship, and I'm so proud of Amber. I feel like the backup quarterback for Amber's family." The Torreses are also involved in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and have found other

families with children diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. John shares, "We've been so blessed to have what we need. God has made a way in every situation. From insurance needs and providing for the basics, and then being able to add on to it. She's a normal child, and that's the best part. She's a normal little girl. She just has diabetes. We wouldn't let her think any less than that."

Hope for the Future

For patients with diabetes, there is hope for the future. Dr. Erani, the chief medical officer for Diabetes America, states, "There have been so many advances. A patient can decrease their risk of complications by controlling blood sugar. A significant impact can be made if you control your diabetes well." There are a number of complications

Katy Diabetes Support Group

Memorial Hermann Katy hosts a diabetes support group once a quarter from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Conference Center Tiger Room A at Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital, 23900 Katy Freeway. Call 281-644-7055 for more information and to RSVP. To make an appointment with a certified diabetes educator at Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital, contact Central Scheduling at 281-644-7180 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 5:15 p.m. Family members are welcome at appointments. Please call Madge Richardson, coordinator of the Diabetes Education Program, at 281-644-7055.



Amber's dad, John Paul, believes that diabetes has made his daughter stronger and bolder

that can occur when their diabetes is not managed appropriately, such as blindness, kidney failure, amputations, heart attacks and stroke. But, according to Dr. Erani, "If you take good care of your diabetes, you can live a normal, happy life." There are a number of advances being made in the research of this disease. It focuses on ways to regenerate or replace new insulin cells, as well as ways to prevent future complications. Being only six years old, Amber can look into the future with hope. But until a cure is found, Amber will have to continue to tightly monitor her blood glucose and insulin levels, all while going to school and church, swimming and singing, and eating bowls of ice cream. Her dad beams, "Diabetes has made her stronger and bolder, but she's still your everyday girl." KM

KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy resident and mother of two. She enjoys running and getting together with friends.

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