



It was the intense thirst that finally persuaded Bob Runge to consult his doctor 24 years ago. Sent for a routine blood test, a few hours later Bob was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. The doctor was matter-of-fact, “You have Type 1 diabetes and you’ll be taking insulin for the rest of your life.”

Looking back, Bob realizes now that he had exhibited many of the classic warning signs of Type 1 diabetes for quite a while. At the time he received the diagnosis, he was 27 years old, in good physical condition and surprisingly, there was no history of the disease in his family. For several months before the diagnosis was made, he had been unusually tired and seemed to be constantly thirsty and going to the bathroom.

But regarding his life back then, he said, “I didn’t consider myself an even remote candidate for diabetes. It didn’t run in my family. I was a

MOUNTAIN BIKING IS ONE OF THE MANY
WAYS BOB RUNGE STAYS ACTIVE.

HOW DIABETES CHANGED HIS LIFE

BY PAM KNEPPER

competitive swimmer and runner. I had traveled extensively in the developing world without ever considering health issues. I had spent six years as a college student with barely more than a cold or two. I was immortal.”

Bob decided to tackle his disease head-on by reading everything he could about it.

One of the first things he discovered is diabetes is a disease in which the body does not effectively use or produce the insulin that is required to metabolize glucose or blood sugar. As a result, too much glucose ends up in the bloodstream, which can damage the circulatory and nervous systems as well as major organs.

He also learned that Type 1 diabetes usually develops due to an autoimmune disorder.

“This is when the body’s immune system behaves inappropriately and starts seeing one of its own tissues

as ‘foreign.’ In the case of Type 1 diabetes, the islet cells of the pancreas that produce insulin are seen as the ‘enemy’ by mistake,” says Bob. “The body then creates white blood cells and antibodies to fight the foreign tissue and subsequently destroys the islet cells’ ability to produce insulin.”

The lack of insufficient insulin thereby results in diabetes. Bob says it is unknown why this autoimmune diabetes develops, but most often it is a genetic tendency. In his case, Bob’s doctor thought his diabetes was triggered by a viral infection that caused inflammation to his pancreas.

“Certain people are more genetically prone to this happening, although, why this occurs is not known,” says Bob. “So you can look at it this way. Two people may be infected with the same virus and only one of them who is genetically

prone will go on to develop diabetes.”

As is the case with all people who have Type 1 diabetes, Bob checks his blood sugar multiple times a day by testing a small blood sample and requires insulin to metabolize glucose and maintain proper blood sugar levels.

“Insulin is required for me to live,” says Bob. “Without it high glucose levels would build up in my blood causing me to feel tired, thirsty or very hungry. If I were to leave these levels untreated, they could eventually lead to complications, such as kidney failure, heart disease, limb amputations or blindness.”

When Bob’s illness was first diagnosed as diabetes, he treated it with once-a-day injections of intermediate-acting insulin. As he became more knowledgeable of diabetes treatment strategies, he began taking



LEFT:
WORKING OUT WITH
BELLEVUE CLUB
PERSONAL
TRAINER KELLY
FENNELLY.

intermediate- and fast-acting insulin to better match his eating, sleeping and daily activity habits.

“Rapid-acting insulin peaks and leaves the body quickly, so it helps to bring the sugar level down faster after you eat. Also, since it leaves the system so fast it makes hypoglycemic reactions less likely to occur several hours after the insulin dose is given,” says Bob. “Intermediate-acting insulin is good at bedtime because of its longevity in your system. This is particularly important when you are sleeping for several hours at a time.”

In 1987, Bob was one of the first diabetic patients to make the switch from insulin shots to an insulin pump.

“My insulin pump delivers rapid-acting insulin 24 hours a day to me through a catheter placed in various locations under my skin,” says Bob. “This keeps my blood glucose levels in a tight range between meals and overnight. It has made living with diabetes much easier for me. Insulin pumps are state-of-the-art tools for treating diabetes and are the closest you can come to having an artificial pancreas.”

Along with checking blood sugar levels and pumping insulin, Bob says he also tries to eat a balanced, healthy diet to keep his diabetes under control.

“It is very important that diabetics pay special attention to the amount

of sugars and starches they consume,” says Bob. “I eat a lot of fruits and vegetables, lean meat, seafood and complex carbohydrates like whole grains because they metabolize slower. I try to avoid sweets because they can shoot my blood sugar levels through the roof.”

When asked if it is difficult to follow such a restricted diet, Bob laughs and credits his wife Nancy for a lot of his success.

“Nancy loves organic foods and limits the number of sweets in our house,” says Bob. “Her discipline has made it easier for me to keep to my diet. Plus, we want to keep our daughters Ava and Isabel healthy too, so it is a win-win situation for everyone.”

Regular exercise also plays an important role in Bob’s life.

“When I joined the Bellevue Club in 2001 it was to help me get in better shape,” says Bob. “Before joining, my family and I had been living in Paris and I found I could not resist the French food. So when I showed up at the Club, I was 30 pounds overweight. I knew I had to get a handle on my weight in order to control my diabetes.”

Bob immediately began working out with a personal trainer and soon shed the 30 pounds he had packed onto his frame. Today, he swims on the Club Masters team and works out with Club Personal Trainer Kelly Fennelly a couple of times a week.

“We do some cardio and strength training, as well as focus on my flexibility and balance,” says Bob. “Working out not only makes me feel better, it helps control my blood sugar levels by making my metabolism work more efficiently.”

When he is not working out at the Club, Bob also enjoys mountain and road biking, hiking, skiing and international travel. “I like to do a variety of things to stay active,” says



BOB CHECKS HIS BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS SEVERAL TIMES A DAY TO HELP HIM MANAGE HIS DIABETES.

RIGHT: BOB WITH WIFE NANCY AND DAUGHTERS AVA AND ISABEL ON A FAMILY VACATION AT THE EQUATOR OUTSIDE QUITO, ECUADOR.

BOTTOM RIGHT: AN INSULIN PUMP HELPS BOB KEEP HIS DIABETES UNDER CONTROL.

BOTTOM LEFT: HIKING IN SEDONA, ARIZONA.



Bob. "I can honestly say I feel my best when I am moving."

To help relieve pent-up stress in his body, Bob frequently goes to a massage therapist. "Before semi-retiring in 2001, I had worked for 20 years in a very stressful environment," says Bob. "This lifestyle played havoc on my body and my blood sugar levels. Luckily, in recent years, I have found that regular exercise and deep-tissue massage, in particular, helps alleviate this stress."

While Bob agrees that checking blood sugar levels, pumping insulin, eating a good diet and getting regular exercise are all important for someone living with diabetes, he also firmly believes in working closely with his doctors.

"Over the years I have always made sure I am going to the best doctors to help me manage my diabetes. In fact, several have told me that I know more about my disease than they do," says Bob. "Diabetes is a highly personal disease, so don't expect your doctor to do it all for you. You need to get in front of it and take responsibility for the care you receive and how you manage it. Diabetes is a moment-to-moment responsibility, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year."

One of the things Bob had to overcome when his illness was first diagnosed as diabetes was his embarrassment with having the disease. "I went through a period of

denial and then I was embarrassed," says Bob. "For many years I never told any of my colleagues that I had diabetes for fear that they would think it would limit my abilities."

Bob says eventually he let his fear and embarrassment go by understanding diabetes was not a death sentence for him. "I realized if I did all the things my doctors told me to do, I could live a very good life without it impairing my day-to-day activities too much," says Bob.

"Today, I look at it more as an inconvenience than as anything else. And in some ways, I credit the disease with helping me stay more focused on my overall health situation than I probably would have otherwise."

While it may seem like an impediment, Bob is aware of the dangers of having diabetes, especially the longer you have it. "When I first learned that I had this disease, I could feel when my blood sugar levels were rising or falling. To combat the problem, I would quickly give myself the proper amount of insulin or glucose and go about my business," says Bob. "Twenty-four years later I am less inclined to feel when my levels rise or fall. That is why checking my blood sugar multiple times a day is so important for me.

Since my body is less sensitive to tell me what is going on inside, my finger sticks definitely can."

As far as the future is concerned, Bob is confident that one day there will be a cure for the disease.

"Right now stem cell research is toying with the idea of growing islet

DIABETES IS A MOMENT-TO-MOMENT RESPONSIBILITY, 24 HOURS A DAY, 365 DAYS A YEAR.

cells that would be transplanted into the pancreas of a diabetic to relieve that person of the disease," says Bob. "While this research is in the infancy stage, just think what it would mean for millions of people if it actually works? It would truly be a miracle for those, like myself, who combat this disease every day of our lives."

So while Bob is hopeful a cure will one day be found, in the meantime he continues to do what is necessary to live with the disease.

"I have been blessed with a good life," says Bob. "I often think that if I hadn't been diagnosed with diabetes my life would have been somewhat destructive because people tend to abuse themselves if nothing talks back to you. In my case, diabetes talked back and my life hasn't been the same since."