



Hannah's Heart — how walking changed one woman's life



At 29, Hannah Williamson was sleeping her life away — literally. "I was always sleeping. I didn't have the energy to take care of my kids or my house." Her lack of energy didn't go unnoticed.

"My mom is a diabetic and she was worried I might have it too," says Hannah, admitting she was deeply in denial of her own health. "I was overweight and smoked, but didn't think I had a problem. I thought maybe I was just depressed."

Then, her father had a stroke at age 53. "It scared me. A few days after the stroke, mom came to the house in the middle of the day and I was sleeping — again. She insisted I take my blood sugar." Hannah finally relented. The reading was over 400. "I went to the doctor and the nurse told me blood sugar that high was coma time. I had literally been in mini comas for months."

Twenty-nine is surprisingly young to develop diabetes. But Hannah's physician at the Davenport Clinic, Rolf Panke, wasn't ready to prescribe medication. His plan for her health was a true wake-up call that changed her life.

"He told me diabetes doesn't have to be devastating and that if I was committed, I could control it by exercise and diet."

Finally motivated, Hannah started walking. A lot.

"It changed me instantly," she says. "I discovered that exercise is really the key to beating diabetes. If my blood sugar was high, I'd go for a walk and it would bring my insulin levels down. If I craved food, I'd go for a walk and it would curb my hunger." And each walk would bring a charge of energy — something Hannah hadn't felt in years.

"When I look back, I was feeling this way as early as 17. Sometimes I wonder how much damage I've done to my body by waiting this long to live a healthy lifestyle."

Learning to eat a diabetic diet was a little harder for Hannah to master. "Dr. Panke sent me to a class on diabetes and how to eat. It was hard. I got discouraged and actually went through a mourning period where I mourned the loss of my old way of life."

But she doesn't mourn any more. In fact, she celebrates.

"In five months, I lost 58 pounds. I've quit smoking. I walk twice a day, have the energy to take care of my family and love it."

And her doctor says that her diabetes is in check. "This whole experience has made me more confident and has changed my life for the better. I now eat to exercise, not exercise to be able to eat."