The Travelin' Man

A country-western star passes on what he's learned about diabetes

May 29, 2015 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

Tim McGraw doesn't have diabetes, but the award-winning artist has seen how the metabolic disease affected the health of his loved ones. Today, nearly 30 million Americans have type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the illness. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body doesn't make enough insulin, a hormone that controls the amount of glucose, or sugar, in the blood. This form of diabetes can also develop if the insulin the body makes doesn't work properly. If the body can't properly control glucose levels, this can result in serious health problems, such as heart disease and stroke. But type 2 diabetes is largely preventable.

This is why the American Diabetes Association and Merck, a pharmaceutical company, launched a campaign urging people with type 2 diabetes to control their blood sugar levels. The campaign is called America's Diabetes Challenge: Get to Your Goals, and McGraw is one of its celebrity spokespersons.

The superstar singer has sold more than 40 million records worldwide. He's won three Grammy Awards, 16 signature "hat" trophies from the Academy of Country Music Awards, 14 Country Music Association Awards, 10 American Music Awards and three crystal trophies from the People's Choice awards, among many others.

Here, Real Health talked with McGraw about his reasons for joining the campaign.

Prior to joining this campaign, what did you know about diabetes?
Well, I'm not a doctor, so I didn't know a lot of details about diabetes. But I know firsthand how the illness affected people that I love and people that I care about.

What did you learn about diabetes from the people you know who suffer from it?
I had an aunt who died of complications of diabetes and I have another aunt who lives with diabetes. In addition, one of my closest friends and a couple of other friends are living with diabetes, so I've seen how it can be managed and I've seen the effect on their lives. I've also seen how diabetes affects people who live with those suffering from it every day.

What do you hope to accomplish by being a part of this campaign?
I hope to make people who have diabetes aware that they can be proactive in managing the

illness and their health. I think that when you talk about diabetes to people and urge them to consult with their physician, they'll learn that they can control their blood sugar levels and manage and the illness. To me, the way to do this is to be proactive; that's the key. I'm very glad I got this opportunity to talk about being proactive as a way to manage this illness because I think that's very important.

What is the most important message that you hope to pass on through this campaign?
Through this campaign, I'm urging Americans to join me in challenging their loved ones with diabetes to get their blood sugar under control. I've learned that about one-third of adults living with diabetes are not at their A1C goal (which is a person's average blood sugar level over 2 to 3 months). That's why we're asking people to go to AmericasDiabetesChallenge.com where they can pledge to work with their doctor to set and reach their own A1C goal. As a part of the challenge, we're also encouraging people living with diabetes to learn if they are at risk for low blood sugar and how to help reduce that risk.

Can you tell us about some of the activities you've participated in that connected with this program, and are there any upcoming events you'll be doing related to it?
While we were in New York, we did a ton of press; we talked to a number of TV shows all across the country and spoke to different magazines doing articles. In addition, there's a big online campaign and I've done interviews for websites. I have a large fan base and there are a lot of people that I can reach. If I can just get some of the people to pay attention and be more proactive in their health and finding out what they can do to work with their doctors, then that may help them consider starting a healthy nutrition and exercise program that can lead them to having a healthier lifestyle. If I can bring that message to just a few people, then I will be satisfied with being involved in this campaign.

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