

Raising a child with Type 1 diabetes.

Cooking Lessons - A Mother, A Daughter, and Type 1  
Diabetes

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# Cooking Lessons

## A Mother A Daughter And Type 1 Diabetes

<http://type1atcollege.com>



*Dedication*

Cooking Lessons -  
A Mother, A Daughter and Type 1 Diabetes  
“We are ALL Type-Something!”



Wouldn't it be **nice** if Type 1 diabetes had a different or shorter name?

Wouldn't it be **good** if this disease was better understood and clearly different from Type 2 diabetes?

Wouldn't it be **great** if Type 1 didn't even exist and we had never had to learn anything about counting carbs and ketones and being low in the middle of the lonely night?

This book is dedicated to both of my amazing daughters, Meredith and Haley. !” I love you tremendously!!!

**Remember - We are all “type-something!”**





Lesson 1  
Level of Difficulty = Extreme  
“Mission: Impossible”

The Food Network is great entertainment, even if you are like me and never, ever cook. They have shows for every taste and technique imaginable – all hosted by a crazy cast of cooks and chefs from a plethora of backgrounds. When you work out of your home – as I do - you get to choose the background noise. My choice is the Food Network!

During the day I hear chatty Rachel Ray, commanding Emeril, and the southern drawl of Paula Deen. But perhaps my favorite is a show titled “Dinner: Impossible”. It is a direct rip-off of ‘Mission: Impossible’ (but alas, no Tom Cruise). At the beginning of each episode, a big Chef leaps into a futuristic auto and proceeds to listen to a top-secret recording, outlining his next mission. These assignments involve extreme culinary endeavors, leading the viewer to conclude that it really could be (almost) impossible to pull off this particular dinner. The Chef always approaches the onerous tasks with great determination and passion.

Being the Mother of a Type 1 daughter can feel a lot like a “Mission: Impossible”. The mothers of Type 1’s are handed the monumental task of raising a Type 1 child *and* preparing them for the world while, at the same time, keeping that same Type 1 child alive each and every day. It sounds a bit dramatic but it is none the less true. Some children are diagnosed before the age of one, and the Type 1 management falls completely on the parent’s shoulders. The older the child is, the more they can do. But if they are living under your roof, chances are they need your assistance in some form, even if they don’t want it.

I am the Mother of a Type 1. Some days I rise to the task, wipe the sweat off my brow and say “whew, done!”. Other days it is a blender of successes and failures. Some days I blow the recipe completely. Things get burned. Pots boil over. Everything ends up in a big mess.

In “Dinner: Impossible”, the Chef theoretically has the opportunity to say “No way, man” and walk away. Of course, he never does. And I can’t either. But there have been many times when I would like to inquire “Can I have a new assignment? Please!?”.



So here I am, hosting my very own “Mission: Impossible” show. I do believe my role is irreplaceable. It appears that this particular gig, depending on when your child is diagnosed with Type 1, can last for more than 20 years and requires intense effort. Then it might let up a bit. I will have to get back to you on that one. My daughter is seventeen and is now a freshman in college. My current role - at this point - can best be described as a “co-host”. Ideally I am the assistant chef and will just hover in the background - ready to spring into action - when and if she needs help.

There are some lessons to be learned from “Dinner: Impossible” that can be applied to mothering a Type 1 child. First of all, the head Chef always acknowledges how difficult the task ahead may be. Even cooking under ideal circumstances seldom yields perfect results.

Raising a diabetes-free daughter and equipping her for adult life is tough enough – I know because my *other* daughter is not diabetic (just Type A, but that is another story). Throw in a “dash of Type 1” and you have all the ingredients for a real challenge.

Understanding the difficulty level of a recipe is helpful; you will set aside additional time and give yourself numerous attempts to master this one. It will take awhile to get it just right. And then, of course, things change just enough to have to keep working at it! That is certainly true in this “Mission: Impossible” assignment.

Secondly, watch what the Chef does right away. Upon accepting the assignment, he gathers his team. He does not attempt to go it alone. There will also be guides present that have the necessary expertise for that particular effort. One episode featured a woman who was knowledgeable in Colonial America cooking; another guide grew unusual herbs for a living. I have learned that you can seldom have too many team members, when it comes to the Type 1 “Mission: Impossible” assignment. Attempting to go solo could be a recipe for disaster.

Third, the show’s end assignment is judged on the outcome. But parents (generally) understand that they have only so much control over how their daughter ‘turns out’ - what the *end outcome* is. Just how she presents herself at any one moment is no indication of her worth and character. She will always be a work in progress, just as we are all of our lives. Giving the “Mission Impossible” assignment my best effort is the correct judgement criteria here. To expect a perfect outcome would be, well – more like “Fantasy Island” than “Mission: Impossible”.

Last – and what is really most important – the Chef always manages to have some fun! Even when things are not going as planned – and at times things have looked pretty crazy – the Chef’s attitude seems to say “I have to do this. I can make it look tough and sweat a lot and have the audience feel amazed at my magnificent efforts *OR* I give up on the super-hero role and have a good time”. Ok, this is show biz. It has to be entertaining. And no one likes a stuffy expert anymore.

But it is still a good reminder for me to just try to get in a laugh, if at all possible. Some days there is no way I could even crack a smile. But then I watch this Chef dance around a blazing fire, getting burned fingers. He roars in pain, but then he moves on – a gleam in his eye.

After all, these “Mission: Impossible” situations are important and worthy assignments. Humor will see you through the bliss and the agony.



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Lesson 7  
Food and Nutrition  
“Good Food...Bad Food”

A Chef dreams of having an unlimited universe of food ingredients to choose from and create with. Almost every food qualifies as *good food* – it gives them more tools to work with. There are no *bad foods*, just poor food preparation methods. Chefs continue to increase their understanding of nutrition. Because they like food so much, they are constantly seeking improved ways to combine great taste with good nutrition. They want everyone to be able to enjoy what they have prepared!

Attitudes that we learn in our family unit about food and eating patterns persist long after we leave home. It usually takes a conscious effort to change and the change is difficult to make. For example, I love to bake but I don't like cooking very much. Easy Mac was a real staple in my household. My husband does like to cook but only had time on week-ends. Odds are that my kids will not love cooking – but then again, they might!



Trying to not become a member of the food police, but still guide your Type 1 and encourage them with good eating patterns is...what? Impossible?! I wouldn't go that far. It is just really, really difficult. The good food/bad food issue is just a big deal to everyone – male and female - living in our

culture. A recent medical study found that Type 1 diabetic college age girls are *twice* as likely to get eating disorders as other girls their age.

Now, every single family and child is different. I have yet to hear the same, exact story. There are parents that have just “given up” and let their young Type 1 kids just eat whatever. There are parents that are Gestapo-like in their approach, counting out every chip and fruit slice. Somewhere between these two extremes is where you will find most of us. Of course, some creative-desperate types try both approaches, depending on the situation. At a child’s birthday party, they have on hand all the sugary treats you could find...and then some! But the next few days are water and oatmeal for all.

Believe me, I have tried all the approaches. No one starts out trying to do it wrong. We all want the best for our kids and our families. But it is just so hard to get this good food/bad food issue right.

What would be getting the food issue right look like? Come on, we can fantasize a little here. Getting it right would be the following scenario – Oh, this is going to be fun. Let’s see. We all get hungry about 3 to 4 times a day. Now, for each meal, there would be food available that offers great taste, balanced nutrition, easy carb counting, minimal food allergens and little preparation time. There would be time and place to come together and share this bounty, allowing us time for good digestion and to appreciate the food we are partaking of. I feel like I am waxing poetic here. But you can see right away that fantasy and reality are pretty much removed from each other...at least for most of us.

My Type 1 child wanted to eat what she believed was a ‘traditional typical teen-age’ diet – pizza and candy, eaten together and washed down with plenty of soft drink. She never wanted to appear different or stand out because of Type 1 and she had decided that *everyone* around her ate that way. In reality, a few of her friends often choose healthier options. Her own teen-age sister ate the junky stuff mainly on week-ends. As a family, we all had improved our eating habits, whether we ate in or out.

Reviewing the consequences of different food choices on blood sugar levels and over-all health had no impact on Haley’s eating habits. Discussing the issue with her diabetic educator had no impact; neither did several visits with an expensive and patient nutritionist. As a parent, the more I attempted to teach her, the more poor food choices she seemed to make. It

got to where meals were becoming *way too focused* on food and not on being together. She would not touch salads or veggies and leave the table surely still hungry. It seemed like we were going backwards in time; with her being a toddler and wanting only “cookie, cookie, cookie!”. Only now she wouldn’t shout it out. She would just go out and get some herself and leave empty junk food bags crumpled under the bed.

It was difficult but I finally had to back out of this issue altogether. Food had become a hot button. There are reams of research supporting the close correlation between extreme parental control and food disorders. Of course, I did not think I had exhibited any sort of extreme behavior, but I also admitted that maybe that is hard to recognize in oneself.

I began to realize that Haley didn’t actually eat that differently than her sister had in the early teen years. Maybe a bit more sugar than starch, but that reflected their own personal tastes. But because I felt that this kind of eating would hurt her Type 1, my anxiety level was ramped up... maybe way up! Again, I attempted to stop making this issue my focus.

There was never any concern on my part that she had any eating disorder. She just made bad food choices. Counseling was considered – after all, this had affected our whole relationship. But I decided to give my new plan of *inaction* some time. And that is when the ‘teachable moment’ did indeed arrive.

It was becoming clear to her that she was the only person paying any attention to what she chose to eat. She was the only one that experienced the blood sugar levels and over-all energy from a meal consumed. Slowly, over time, she began to make clearly better choices. Yes, she does still eat junky stuff on week-ends, like her sister. But she is also sticking nutrition articles on the front of the frig and making smoothies for us all. Believe me, they are the best tasting drink a Type 1 parent could enjoy!



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