

## Diabetes and Me: Living a Healthy and Empowered Life in the Face of Diabetes

**Wendy Louise Novak**

Disruption Books

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*The upbeat memoir Diabetes and Me celebrates instances of personal thriving despite a challenging type 1 diabetes diagnosis.*

Wendy Louise Novak's optimistic memoir *Diabetes and Me* captures her life with a chronic disease.

Novak was seven years old when she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Because her father had the same condition, her parents were equipped to teach her how to manage her own health. She gave herself daily insulin shots as a child; later, she was able to switch to an insulin pump. She used to measure her blood sugar levels with paper test strips; now, she has a glucose monitor attached to her skin. And early on in particular, Novak faced the stigma around diabetes and often avoided disclosing her illness to others.

Mixing personal information with didactic asides, the book reveals how much of Novak's life was informed by diabetes. Even her personal milestones, like marrying her husband David and deciding to get pregnant with her daughter Ashley, involved considering the risks and limitations placed on her by the disease. But thanks to adequate care, Novak has nonetheless been able to lead a happy and fulfilling life.

Diabetes is often a tangential factor in the book's stories, though. As the memoir progresses, it stretches to include enthusiastic descriptions of a postgraduation European trip with friends—for which Novak packed insulin but was otherwise unimpeded—and tales of Novak's annual attendance at the Kentucky Derby, where extravagant outfits and bets on the races are the focus, not illness (even though Novak's blood sugar levels dropped one year and she had to be carried out "like Cinderella"). Family life results in heartwarming scenes, too: Novak's husband is celebrated for his consistent care for her, including during serious health troubles, as with a broken neck and a stroke; and with her keen consideration of the family implications of having a tubal ligation.

Less involving are the book's educational asides. Space is devoted to specific medical topics, including diabetic retinopathy, the symptoms of hyperglycemia, and the signs used to identify somebody having a stroke. Not all such subjects are made to connect to diabetes, however. And the assertion that diabetes should not prevent a person from enjoying life is repeated without need. Still, the book does express sympathetic concerns regarding the skyrocketing price of insulin, with a sobering reminder that not everyone can afford to take care of themselves as well as Novak does.

Upbeat in tone, the memoir *Diabetes and Me* celebrates instances of personal thriving despite a type 1 diabetes diagnosis.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (August 23, 2023)

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