



Health & Fitness

Diabetes Rising: How a Rare Disease Became a Modern Pandemic and What to Do About It

Dan Hurley

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The Logan County, West Virginia, Wal-Mart has a huge blue banner proudly proclaiming, “Sweetest Store on Earth! Number One Wal-Mart in the World in Sales of Little Debbie Snack Cakes.”

That’s one of Logan County’s claims to fame, author Dan Hurley tells us. The other is that Logan County has the highest incidence of diabetes in the United States. It has taken the American medical community 100 years to put those things together, and although the link between obesity and diabetes now seems overwhelming, nothing in the world of diabetes is simple. As Hurley reports, to this day we are not entirely sure what causes diabetes, whether it is one disease or two, or how to prevent or cure it. What we do know is that diabetes is killing Americans at a faster and faster rate, at an increase of 3,400 percent just since World War II, and it shows no sign of slowing down.

As befitting a book about stalking a killer, Dan Hurley has written *Diabetes Rising* like a detective story, with enough false leads, dead ends, and cliffhangers to hook readers and keep them turning the pages.

Few people are more qualified to write this medical mystery story. An award-winning journalist for medical publications and the *New York Times*, Hurley has been matching wits with the killer for thirty years inside his own body—he developed type I diabetes in 1975, and his description of his last supper as a non-diabetic on Thanksgiving is harrowing. One of the many strengths of this book, in fact, is Hurley’s ability to juxtapose masses of historical medical information with highly personal stories, his own and those of others, which give a human face to this impersonal killer. We want a cure for diabetes, not just for mankind, but for Hurley and his young daughter.

But there is no cure on the horizon. Readers can sense Hurley’s frustration when he

writes, “During the year I spent researching this book, diabetes has been prevented in mice dozens of times, yet none of those treatments has been proved effective in humans. Maybe vitamin D will be a great breakthrough, or maybe not. Maybe hydrolyzed baby formula...or a modest reduction in weight, or combining them will be the best step. Or maybe they will all be a bust.”

While the medical community wades through this mare’s nest of hypotheses, the great beast continues to grow and get closer. There it is now, in aisle seven at Wal-Mart, next to the Little Debbie Snack Cakes. (January) Jack Shakely