

Dinah-mite

Teresa Munson and Diabetes Assist Dog Dinah by Diane W. Carr

Diabetes is a common, but often little understood disease. For many people with Type I diabetes, it is a predictable routine of balancing the intake of insulin with the food and exercise of the patient.

But for some, life can be anything but predictable. Even under the best of circumstances, their blood sugar levels can swing from dangerously low to dangerously high. A severe drop in blood sugar can quickly render someone unconscious. Extremely high levels wreck havoc on the kidneys, heart and other organs. These blood levels swings can occur with little or no warning.

Teresa Munson of St. Paul, Minn. is a nurse who is also a Type I diabetic. Although she is medically trained and diligent in her diabetes care, she still experiences extreme swings in her blood sugar levels. "I am prone to sudden drops in blood sugar," she tells Can Do Canines. She's found that the unpredictability of her blood sugars significantly impacts her day-to-day life as mom, wife, community volunteer and nurse. Diagnosed 5 years ago, Teresa soon found that she could not identify when her blood sugars drop to a dangerous level, a condition called hypoglycemia unawareness. Such drops and spikes can cause serious health problems and even death.

Blood sugar drops can hit hard. One day Teresa planned to work in her garden, having tested her blood sugar just before leaving the house. While her sugar level was normal when she went into the yard, a short time later she found herself passing out, desperately needing sugary food to return to normal. That time, her children were there to help. But they aren't always near and able to respond. Teresa's diabetes not only dictated much of her life but her whole family's lives as well. Her children were always on guard to notice any symptoms of a low blood sugar. Her husband Craig worried daily that a "crash" would come for Teresa when no one was around.

Teresa may never have learned of Diabetic Assist Dogs without her neighbors, Pat and Dee Dee Heffernan. At the Munson annual New Year Eve's party, they were talking with Teresa about her diabetes. After learning of Teresa's blood sugar problems, Pat and Dee Dee, being the great Can Do Canines

ambassadors that they are, immediately jumped at the chance to talk to Teresa about assistance dogs. With their support and encouragement, she applied to Can Do Canines for a Diabetes Assist Dog.

She never imagined how much freedom and security the program would bring, or how cuddly it would be.



Teresa and Dinah

Dinah, a Diabetes Assist Dog, is a sweet, lovable, 2 ½ year old yellow Labrador Retriever who came into Teresa and her family's life last fall. Dinah can smell when Teresa's blood sugars start to drop before she experiences any signs of trouble. Teresa and Dinah worked together, with the trainers at Can Do Canines, to become a team. Dinah quickly learned to identify Teresa's drops in blood sugars. During Dinah's first night at home she identified two dangerously low blood sugars, including one drop

that took place while Teresa was sleeping. She gives Teresa clear, specific warnings – by nudging her with her nose – when her sugar is low. In addition to sounding the alarm, Dinah is trained to fetch the emergency phone and to bring juice when needed. Though not specifically trained for the behavior, Dinah has also learned to recognize dangerously high blood sugars as well. Her family rightly calls her "Dinah-mite".

When asked about Dinah's immediate impact on her family, Teresa says that everyone could finally relax. Craig could go out of town without worrying that a tragedy was in the making. Her children got to resume the tasks of being children, not blood sugar guardians. Most importantly, Teresa says, is the independence she feels with Dinah. She can go anywhere and know that Dinah will alert her for dangerous changes in her blood sugar levels. Coworkers at the medical clinic where Teresa works love the fuzzy, four-foot glucose monitor. They tell her that Dinah also brings a sense of relief and security to them. They no longer fear that a closed door on Teresa's office is concealing a medical crisis.

Teresa has some advice to other diabetics. "Don't be afraid to try it" encourages Teresa. "The Diabetic Assist Dog program is wonderful and Can Do Canines is with you every step of the way". ♥

New Teams



Deb Swenson & Mobility Assist Dog Cyrus

"I'm getting out of the house and I am enjoying my life again."

Thank You

Dog Source - Amy Ross

Field Trainer - Kemlyn Block-Stockstill

Vet Services - Maryland Avenue Pet Hospital

Puppy Raiser - Sue Engelsman

Foster Home - Kathryn & Jayson Alexander

See their web-exclusive story at www.can-do-canines.org/newsletter



Nick Murray & Autism Assist Dog Castiel

"People don't always understand how great animals are for people and what a difference it makes. I hope that other families find the love and joy that we have."

Thank You

Dog Source - Karen Lindstrom

Vet Services - Arden Shoreview Animal Hospital

Puppy Raiser - Rob Carrick

Foster Home - The Turner Family

Read their story on page 5