

THE SWEET CASE OF THE REVERSAL

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This World Health Day, Tehseen Mehdi, a 41-year-old businesswoman, shares how she successfully reversed the life-crippling condition of diabetes.

He stood before us confidently and said, "If someone holds out two spoons before you, one filled with sugar and the other with milk, take the former." A loud cry of surprise was followed by a long silence, not to mention the stares of bewilderment and confusion. Dr Promod Tripathi was addressing a group of diabetic patients, and I was one of them, hanging on to each and every word. Dr Tripathi was enlightening us on the acidic

nature of milk — which while considered safe for diabetics actually did more harm than the infamous sugar.

But this was only one of the many surprises that were hurled at me through the first two years of being diagnosed with diabetes in the summer of 2012. The diagnosis itself was accidental. A generic blood test, conducted prior to a warranted ovarian surgery, revealed elevated blood sugar levels, and the presence of the said condition. My diagnosis left me extremely confused for a few months, as I failed to configure which foods were safe enough for me to eat. Of course, I had nutritionists who'd crafted diet charts for me, but coming home to meals you've grown up with, and not knowing whether they're safe for consumption anymore is significantly disheartening.

Eventually, I ended up eating less and started to fear food. Reading up on the condition too did more harm than good for my mental wellbeing.

Coming from a family with no history of diabetes, and being a relatively active person throughout my life, I didn't quite fit the stereotype of a diabetic. However, when I reflect on my eating habits, I can vouch for the fact that at five feet one inch, and 54 kilos, I was a perfect example of 'normal-weight' or 'healthy BMI' (body mass index) category, but I lived with the time bomb of a high fat percentage. I learnt to never trust BMI alone!

All that of course changed after my diagnosis. With a blood sugar of 200, medication and insulin shots became the order of the day, and my diet took a less appetising turn. My meals had to be prepared separately and quite naturally, I convinced myself to give up on rice and potatoes in an attempt to follow a low carb diet, as a means to fix my condition. A year and a half later, I was five kilos lighter and in relatively better health. But I was keen to modify my lifestyle to one where I could survive sans the medication by solely monitoring my meals.

Much like my diagnosis, my introduction to Sharan, the organisation that helped me reverse diabetes, was a sheer matter of chance. It was a casual conversation with a few friends, that practically changed my life.

Bangalore-based Sharan was conducting its first session in Mumbai — a three-week-long course. The testimonials on their website alone were convincing enough for a visit. The insights shared by Dr Tripathi during those three weeks were difficult to digest, but they did change the opinions of diabetics and non-diabetics alike.

It wasn't easy to come to terms with the concept of a vegan diet, which was the organisation's principle.

Vegan diets are devoid of all animal based products, and include plant-based meals and organic products. For the second time since my diagnosis, my diet underwent a complete overhaul, and there was a lot that I had to adapt to.



For three weeks I followed this strict diet plan, and it was not easy. The minimal sugar and oil that I had been consuming over the past 18 months had to be eliminated completely and my craving for anything sweet had to be satisfied by fruits alone. Green smoothies loaded with spinach and mint leaves became the order of the day. Breakfast was made with lentils and pulses. Though the four glasses of smoothies that I consumed kept me full, the desire to binge between meals was countered by munching on roasted chickpeas. However, it wasn't this addition that bothered me as much as the elimination of the few indulgences that the diabetologists and nutritionists had previously given their nod to.

I had grown up on a nonvegetarian diet. I still ate a lot of eggs when I married into a Hindu household, and ate less meat. But even eggs were now completely eliminated from my diet. Milk, in all its forms, was banned. And while giving up other milkbased products like paneer and cheese weren't as difficult, the elimination of curd from my diet really got to me. Eating a bowl of curd post lunch was something that I enjoyed with my family. Now all I could do was watch them eat something that I wasn't permitted to eat. It was very difficult.

But on the other hand I was introduced to a different and new world of food. For the first time in 18 months, I ate brown rice and it felt like a new lease of life. The threeweeks-long session encouraged me to foray into the world of jowar, bajra and other variety of millets. I learned to make organic curd, dhoklas with plant-based milk and dates replaced sugar in desserts. In fact, I can now make vegan chocolate icecream! To put it simply, my purpose in life revolved around substituting all the problematic ingredients in my favorite meals with organic and healthy alternates. Finally, in three weeks, I reversed my diabetes.

In fact, my family nibbled on my meals, and incorporated some of the foods into their diets as well. They are all much healthier now. It reflects in their blood reports, and we're all leading better lives now.

I'm often questioned if I miss eating regular processed foods that are a staple of the Indian diet. And my answer is no. The insights provided to us during those three weeks provided enough evidence that the food we normally consume create a havoc in our system. I'm repulsed by all processed foods. Having been born in a Muslim family, I've grown up on non-vegetarian food. But now, I'll never be able to eat non vegetarian food again.

I've gone from being a person whose diet was only 20 per cent healthy to someone who rarely eats junk food. And to be completely honest, I am a big foodie. I think about food all the time. I'm not sure if that is the safest thing for a diabetic to say. But since I've turned to organic meals, I have the privilege of eating everything I want, without worrying about what it is that I am putting into my mouth.

It has been over two years since I've cured myself of diabetes, and the journey has been tough, but as of this day, I am free of medication and liberated from the fear of food. — **As told to Sonia Lulla**

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