

WHY I RUN FOR TEAM DIABETES

DEK Debbie Muir Zelez and her son both live with type 1 diabetes. But that hasn't stopped her from raising funds and awareness—and crossing the marathon finish line with her run crew

Debbie Muir Zelez, a 44 year-old who grew up in Calgary, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when she was 10 years old. It's a difficult disease to manage, but she never let it define who she is. She lives her life to the fullest and, when she had twins in 2003, she started to run. Her son Jake was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in 2015.

"What started as morning walks with the kids in the stroller turned into morning runs and it just grew from there," says Zelez, adding that when she runs for charity, it gives her more drive and determination to finish what she's started. "Something appealed to me about the sport and a little turned into a little more, all the way up to the marathon!"

Zelez, was a quick study and ran her first full marathon with Team Diabetes in Honolulu in 2006. Team Diabetes is a fundraising program for Diabetes Canada, a national health charity that is making the diabetes epidemic in Canada visible and urgent. Since her first marathon, she has completed two Half Ironmans and is training for her first full Ironman in Arizona later this year.

Her racing gives her the opportunity to correct people who are misinformed about diabetes.

"People often think type 1 diabetes is a lifestyle disease, something we have from eating too much sugar or not exercising, but Jake and I have an autoimmune disease. Our bodies don't produce insulin. An insulin pump is now our delivery system—it's how we get our insulin," she says. "What most people don't realize is we NEVER get a break from this disease. We always have to be three steps ahead, deciding what to do next."

As part of her approach to managing her life, family, and disease, Zelez is defiant, loud, and proactive. her work with Team Diabetes—on the frontline raising money and on start lines wearing a Team Diabetes singlet at races from Calgary to Honolulu, where she hopes to return this December—is important for her and her children. She encourages her kids to set big goals, including Jake, who has to live with diabetes at an impressionable young age as she did.



"You never know who you are inspiring—it doesn't matter if you finish first or last, the point is that you do it and don't give up," she says. "If I can inspire just one person with diabetes to go for it and to not give up, that's great. If I can inspire my son, that's priceless." Zelez is quick to say that living with diabetes and being a mother of a child with diabetes is one part of who she is. Her way of making a difference is by working with Team Diabetes and as a result, contributing to Diabetes Canada. Team Diabetes is at races from Iceland to Regina, India to Hamilton, and will have a huge presence at the Canada Army Run, Ottawa Marathon, Niagara Falls International Marathon and this fall's Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon, to name a few.

For Zelez, encouraging runners of all stripes to get involved with Team Diabetes gives added meaning to her runs. She encourages everyone to get involved with her run crew.

"You don't have to run a marathon or do an Ironman to help raise awareness and participate with Team Diabetes—you can walk, run, hike or bike," she says. "There are different distances and something for everyone. Our community is open to everyone and everyone who helps the Diabetes Canada will be greeted with open arms."

Visit www.teamdiabetes.ca for more information about Team Diabetes and diabetes.ca for more information about diabetes and Diabetes Canada.

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