Women living with type 1 diabetes go the distance

Erin Spineto

Each year, I lead a team of people with type 1 diabetes (T1D) on what is often considered the adventure of a lifetime. In the summer of 2017, I wrapped up another one of my Sea Peptide adventures, this time in the beautiful waters of Turks & Caicos. On my adventures, the following philosophies are key for success:

- Every person with diabetes can be happy.
- Every person with diabetes needs others to commiserate with, to plan with, and to adventure with.
- Your big adventure may not be the same as my big adventure — but whatever your BIG is, you can find a way to make it safe with diabetes.

This year, as part of the One Drop Caicos adventure, my trek with Erika Young and Kati Long included 50 miles on paddle boards, 20 miles hiking and swimming, and another 50 miles on bikes for a total of 120 miles from South Caicos to North Caicos. The goal? To get a group of people living with T1D together to push beyond what we think we are capable of achieving. Living with diabetes day in, day out can get tough, and having or making adventures remind us that we are more than just our diabetes. We are stronger than our highest highs and lowest lows. We all need a little reminding every now and then!

We started training in January, 2017. I put together a
Erin Spineto was diagnosed with diabetes in 1996. When she ran out of motivation after fighting hard for twelve years, she turned to adventure to provide the motivation she sought starting with a 100-mile solo sail down the Florida Keys. You can read more about her adventures on her blog: SeaPeptide.com. Erin currently lives in San Diego, California, USA.

training program for Erika, Kati & myself at the start of the year and for the next six months leading up to the trip, we trained each day, keeping each other accountable and updated on our progress even though we do not live in proximity to each other.

When One Drop Caicos finally began, our trio was ready for action. Our team was set; we had all our diabetes supplies carefully packed, meals and snacks planned out for our days, and specially-designed rigs that I made to carry backpacks (which included essential diabetes supplies). We towed our rigs behind us in the water as we swam from cay to cay.

When you’re out on an adventure sometimes your safety can be in the hands of your teammates and you want to know that they have put in the time to be competent, should you need them. With Kati & Erika by my side, I felt fully confident in our crew. With an all-woman team, we all knew and understood just how far we could push ourselves. Adding type 1 diabetes into the mix and we were unstoppable! All of us understood what we were going through when we saw blood glucose spikes during or after an eight-hour paddle or when any of us endured hypoglycaemia that would not let up. Without saying a word, we knew each other’s pains and triumphs. We also encouraged each other, pushed each other and held each other’s packs when someone needed a juice break. Our trio went to the limit and beyond.

When I finish and succeed on an adventure, I am always motivated to take good care of my diabetes and after returning from the Caribbean, I am once again back home with a renewed passion for taking amazing care of my diabetes.

While I set out on these adventures always with a milestone in mind (this time, it was 120), the end-goal isn’t about hitting that magic number any more than taking care of diabetes is about always catching a blood sugar unicorn (100 mg/dL). Instead, it’s all about doing the best we can, together, and pushing ourselves to do better than yesterday. And our trio learned to do just that.