

Why testing my DNA was the best thing I ever did

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Tomorrow, 14 November 2020, is World Diabetes Day and I'd like to share why these three simple steps have changed my life

For as long as I can remember, I have been afraid of getting diabetes. There is loads of it on my Mom's side of the family. In fact, I have grandmothers, great grandmothers and great aunts that died from this disease. Granted, some of it was in the days before there was a treatment. However, the point is that if it's coming for me, it's of a particularly nasty strain. My uncle has it and I don't envy him. It has trickled down his side of the family too.

It came as almost heaven-sent information when I found out that, by testing your DNA, you can get an idea of which diseases you are predisposed to, in your genes. After a simple buccal swab in the mouth, you hand in your saliva sample, and you get the results two weeks later.

The doctor that presented me with my results, Dr Christa North, was gentle and thorough. She spent a lot of time explaining everything in great detail. I found out all sorts of things, including why I feel at my best in the afternoons, what I should and should not eat, which deficiencies I have and why I never stop eating (true story!).

When we got to the part about diabetes, whadoyaknow ...there it was. I have the gene that indicates that my chances of getting it are real. On the colour-coded report, I saw red, red and more red! My heart sank.

And this is when things started to change. You see, the doctor explained that it's not about the fact that you have a chance of getting it or that it's in your genes. It's about using this information to avoid it! DNA is a trigger and knowing what your DNA looks like enables you to work around it and prevent it being triggered.

Thanks to a good friend who works in the pharmaceutical industry, I was able to get an appointment with a fantastic endocrinologist, who specialises in prevention. He gave me three very important steps to follow:

- Cut out all sugar. Specifically fizzy drinks (as they are the most harmful), but best to cut out all sugar.
- Start exercising. Your fitness in your forties has a major impact on your health in later decades. Three times a week is a good start but four to five times is ideal.
- Don't pick up weight! The fatty band that women get around their tummies can be very harmful in the onset of diabetes.

Cutting out sugar was easy. After a few weeks, I didn't miss it at all. In fact, now, if I eat the odd piece of cake, I actually feel overwhelmed by the sugary taste in my mouth. I have been able to maintain my weight position and eat healthily to ensure I stay in shape.



The need to exercise more regularly sent me out into the many nature reserves near my home to start jogging. This has become one of my greatest joys and is now something I look forward to almost every day. Spending time in nature is the best way to clear your head, process your thoughts from the day, unwind and destress. I aim for five runs per week and I usually meet this goal.

From now on, September is blood test month. Every year, I go for a blood test to see what's going on, on the diabetes front. This way, I know exactly where I stand with my health and, to date, I am diabetes free.

So, as much as I got the answer that I did not want to hear at all, I now understand that I can play a role in living healthily and preventing or at least slowing down the onset of diabetes. Truth be told, I had always taken my extremely good health for granted. In retrospect, it's silly that it had to get to this point for me to make these changes, but I am extremely thankful that I know what I now do.

And that is why testing my DNA was the best thing I ever did. I tested mine through www.geneway.co.za and would recommend it to anyone wanting to unlock the keys to good health and to live your best life.

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