

Comment: I found hope after discovering type 2 diabetes was not inevitable



Rita Pinto with one of her sons. (Supplied)

Rita Pinto, spent decades believing that one day she would develop type 2 diabetes because it ran in her family. As the 48-year-old nurse tells SBS, understanding the truth about the disease empowered her to prevent it.

By Rita Pinto, **Presented by** Yasmin Noone

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--- The new landmark series [Australia's Health Revolution with Dr Michael Mosley](#) premieres Wednesday 13 October at 7.30pm on SBS and SBS On Demand. Join the conversation #AusHealthRevolution ---

My mum was only 35-years-old when she passed away due to renal failure.

At that time, she was living in India. Now, looking back, I see that renal failure may have been a possible complication that arose from living with diabetic kidney disease. I don't know for sure because she passed away so long ago. But I'm guessing she knew she had type 2 diabetes and ignored it, carrying on with her lifestyle, until the disease eventually took her life.

For the many years that followed her death, I lived with the impression that type 2 diabetes was a hereditary disease - so no matter what I ate or did, I would get it. Both my sisters developed type 2 diabetes and I had gestational diabetes during both of my pregnancies so that all fed into my belief. I really believed a diagnosis was inevitable.

In my mind, it was only a matter of time before I received the news that I had type 2 diabetes. I really believed a diagnosis was inevitable.

Before I went on the SBS series, *Australia's Health Revolution with Dr Michael Mosley*, I was living with pre-diabetes. My blood sugar level was on the high side of normal and it had been that way for a long time. Every year, the level seemed to go up a notch – from 5.1 to 5.2, then 5.2 to 5.3 mmol/L and so on.

My job was a wake-up call

I currently work as a clinical nurse in a hospital in WA and occasionally get called into the vascular theatre. That's where we do amputations [related to diabetes]. It's very confronting when you see an amputation and have a family history of type 2 diabetes.

When I used to assist in the amputation of a limb, I'd think 'this may be me one day if I don't take care of myself'.

I'd always whine and cry to the surgeon saying 'I am going to die when I get type 2 diabetes. I will have my toes cut off from gangrene'. He would say, 'no you won't: you've got to just live a healthy lifestyle, stop eating carbs and exercise more'.

One day, he told me that Dr Michael Mosley was coming to Perth and encouraged me to apply to be on his show. I did and was accepted to be one of the participants. Soon thereafter, I began to diet and make lifestyle changes, with professional support and supervision.



The meal plan I was given included recipes featuring fresh, unprocessed foods. Each day, I aimed to reduce my calories and limit my carbohydrate intake to help reduce my blood sugar levels. I was also reminded how important protein was in our diet; protein would help to reduce the loss of muscle mass while also enabling me to feel full after eating.

You have to want to change and have the willpower to follow through. If you've got that power, you can achieve anything you want in life.

I changed my mind to change my health

The biggest change I made was not about food or exercise, it was the change I made to the way I thought. I realised that even though I was living with pre-diabetes, I could prevent getting type 2 diabetes by managing my weight.

I discovered that if I wanted a healthy life, I could get it. But I had to act quickly and do the right things. I realised that I could no longer just sit back and say 'it's going to hit me someday, so let it hit me when it has to'.

To initiate that change, I learned to overcome food temptations, as I've always craved sweets. Before I went on this diet, I'd say 'I want to eat it because I'm stressed, tired or hungry'. But now, I ask myself: 'do I really need this? Do I really want to eat it?' Even if I do cave into temptation occasionally, I don't eat sweets in the same quantity as I used to.

I have also started cooking my own food, as my husband used to cook for me (he loves cooking and I love eating!), So that was a huge step forward.

I now find a tasty recipe that I like and cook it twice a week. I enjoy making lemon coriander chicken, chilli and garlic prawns, beef marinated in yoghurt, and stir-fries packed with lots of vegetables. I prep all my meals beforehand and bring breakfast, lunch and dinner with me to work to avoid the temptation to buy food or eat cakes from the hospital's tearoom.

These days, I am still eating healthily and exercising. I recently did a finger prick test with a blood glucose monitor. The reading was 4.7, which is within the normal, recommended range. I was so happy to see that number. I am now no longer living with pre-diabetes.

The truth is that you can prevent type 2 diabetes if you take action, stick to eating better and move more.

Most of us know what we have to do to live a healthy lifestyle. But we want to continue living in our own little bubble. We think that if we stay there, type 2 diabetes is not going to touch us. Then one day something happens and we realise we can't escape reality – even if we are still living in a bubble of denial.

The truth is that you can prevent type 2 diabetes if you take action, stick to eating better and move more. To get healthy, you've got to have the right mindset and seek out support.

This story contains general information only. Consult your doctor or medical professional for advice that is suited to your circumstances. If you need assistance with your diet or for dietary advice, always consult a GP, endocrinologist, diabetes educator or Accredited Practising Dietitian.

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