

ARCHIE CHAVEZ

Archie Chavez says he comes from a long line of people with diabetes and knows only too well what can happen to a family when diabetes is not kept under control. “I have some sisters and brothers who have died from complications already. My wife also has diabetes in her family.”

Because of his family history, Archie has always understood the importance of being physically active. “My wife and I started walking way back in the 1960s before it was fashionable.”

Archie has always taken pride in how active he is. “I have officiated at basketball, baseball and softball games for many years, so I have always had plenty of exercise,” he says. He was raised on a ranch and had a very active life until he had a stroke and had to cut back on his activity. “I stopped officiating games and was not getting the level of exercise I had been.” It was after that when Archie was diagnosed with diabetes. He said his doctor told him to reduce the amount of time he was working out with weights and increase his aerobic activity.

Although Archie was diagnosed with diabetes and he understands how devastating it can be, he didn't lose heart. He still tries his best to take care of himself. He acknowledges that family support is very important, and says his wife is his greatest supporter. “My wife studied the diabetes diet because of her mother, so we have changed the way we eat.”

Archie emphasizes that “people need support in order to change. My wife was a big support to me and I am to her. I think that is the most important step to change. It's hard to do it by yourself. If you are married, get your spouse to exercise with you.”

From Archie's point of view, there are always things that can get in the way of a commitment to staying physically fit. That's why he walks first thing in the morning. “The best time to walk is in the morning, early morning. If you leave it to the afternoon, too many things happen so you can't actually exercise. My wife and I are retired so we get up at 5:30 to go to the gym for exercise from 6:30 to 7:30. Then we wash up and go to church. After church, we eat breakfast. I have changed my eating habits so I don't have to take medication. I love breakfast, but I am eating less and eating many more vegetables and fruit.”

Besides lowering his blood sugar, Archie has seen how his staying physically active has helped keep his blood pressure down. “I monitor my blood pressure and when I have been walking, it is 110 over 74. I see that quite a bit. I don't get as light-headed as I used to. We can actually see results. My wife has been diagnosed with early osteoporosis and she needs to walk as well, so we just keep going.”

Archie says that if he had it all to do over again, he might have asked more questions of his doctor when the doctor told him to “watch his blood sugar.” Archie recommends that everyone get a physical exam every year, and to ask that blood sugars be checked. He also recommends that people pay extra attention to what a doctor says - even if he doesn't emphasize it. He noted that doctors are so busy they often don't have the extra time it takes to warn their patients sufficiently. It is up to the individual to watch out for himself - a fact, according to Archie, that is especially true of people who have diabetes in their family.

Although Archie takes responsibility for himself, he also wishes his doctor had been more vigilant. “It is important that doctors tell their patients what to do ahead of time - like watching your carbs. If I had been told what to do, I would have done it.”

Archie's Advice

1. The first week, walk five minutes away from your home. Then walk back. That's 10 minutes. Do that every day. Then the next week, add another five minutes. Just keep adding five minutes each week and, before you know it, you are walking 20 to 30 minutes a day.
2. It is important to get a physical every year. Your body is just like a car motor and you can run out of gas.