

THE ECONOMIC TIMES ON SUNDAY

High on life

Daily insulin shots have done nothing to dampen the spirits of this 16-year-old

THE DAYS are packed for Jai Mathur (name changed), a Class XI student at a posh south Delhi school. So busy is the 16-year-old that he finds it difficult to take out 10 minutes from his schedule for a photo shoot for this feature.

"Can't you do without a photograph? I have school in the morning, a music exam (electric guitar) in the afternoon and some running to do to prepare for the Delhi half-marathon on Sunday. I'm a long-distance runner, I have to be there," says Mathur.

It's difficult to believe that Mathur has insulin-dependent type-1 and has five insulin shots every day, two in the morning, one in the afternoon and two at night. But school, basketball, running and music keep him so busy that he has no time to mope. "The only things I really miss are Bournvita and kaju barfi. I still play and run, so the diabetes hasn't really made much of a difference to my life," says Mathur.

He was diagnosed with type-1 diabetes two years ago. "I've always been very athletic and the diagnosis was actually ironic. I'm crazy about basketball and was diagnosed with the disorder two weeks after I got my basketball jersey to play for the school team. Once I got diagnosed, I had to hand the jersey back," he says.

Mathur got kicked out of the school team because the coach and school did not want to be responsible for complications such as hypoglycaemia, a condition not uncommon among people with diabetes. Hypoglycaemia is a condition in which the sugar levels plummet below the normal levels needed for the body to function and the brain gets deprived of fuel, making the person incoherent and dizzy. He does not hold not being in the team against the school.

"Hypoglycaemia happens at times and you can't blame anyone. I'm not in the school team but I still play a lot of basketball," he says.

Mathur has to watch what he eats because that's what decides his insulin dose for the day. "The situation is quite cool. It took some time to adjust to taking injections daily and calculating the daily dosage, but it's almost as automatic as breathing now," he says.

No one else in the Mathur family has diabetes, which is why the family was caught completely unprepared when he fell ill two years ago. "It happened very quickly. I developed the classic symptoms of extreme thirst and frequent urination, which made me go to the loo every 15 minutes. It really spooked my parents," he laughs.

Then there was the weight loss. "Within two weeks, I had lost so much weight that the bones on my face began to show. I also felt so tired all the time that climbing three steps would put me out of breath. Blood tests showed I had type-1 diabetes, and I'm on insulin since then," says Mathur, who was in Class IX when he was diagnosed. He went on to get 82 per cent in his Class X boards. "My results were fine because all I wanted was the science stream. I got that," he says.

His younger sister is healthy and Mathur has no complaints from life. "One of the doctors I went to said my pancreas — which produces insulin — packed up because I exerted myself too much. I don't know why it happened, but I have no regrets. I like my life and would not like to change anything about it," he says.

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RONJOY GOGOI/HT

INSULATED: Despite being diabetic, 16-year-old Jai Mathur plays his favourite game like any other boy his age.

AVOIDING A SUGAR HIGH

Uncontrolled sugar levels can put diabetics at risk of complications such as blindness, heart attack, stroke and rarely, amputation. If the following tests were done annually, treatment costs would be halved

Sugar tests

Blood sugar fasting should be below 110, post-fasting should be below 140. Also get an HbA1c test done once every six months to get the average blood sugar for the past three to six months. It should be below 7 per cent.

If you use a glucometer to test your sugar level at home, get it calibrated every six months. Cost: Between Rs 500 and Rs 800

Dilated eye exam

An ophthalmologist should use eyedrops to examine the back of the eye for damage. This can

detect early diabetics retinopathy, which can damage the retina and can cause blindness.

Cost: About Rs 500

Blood pressure

The risk of heart disease and stroke is two to four times higher for people with diabetes. Keep blood pressure below 120/80.

Cost: Your doctor should do it as part of every check-up. Costs about Rs 100 otherwise.

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) evaluation

Coronary artery disease apart,

diabetics are at higher risk of artery blockage in other parts of the body. After the blood pressure is taken at the arms, also measure the blood pressure at the ankles to test for PAD. The difference in the higher limit should be lower than 20. A higher reading indicates a peripheral artery blockage.

Max Healthcare: Rs 300 to Rs 500

Lipid Profile

Total cholesterol should be below 200, artery-blocking LDL (bad cholesterol) should be below 100, heart-protecting HDL

(good cholesterol) should be over 45. Triglycerides reading, which tends to be higher in diabetics, should be below 150.

Cost: Rs 600 to Rs 1000

Foot exam

If uncontrolled, diabetes can cause nerve damage (diabetic neuropathy) throughout the body. Symptoms include numbness, pain or weakness in the extremities, such as the feet, legs and hands. Check your feet for cuts and sores and get a foot exam done once in six months.

Cost: Rs 200 to Rs 500