

# Running a happy household

## when a child has diabetes

Author Brenda Novak writes best-selling novels like *White Heat*, but that's child's play compared with empowering her son, Thad, to manage his type 1 diabetes while giving the rest of the gang equal time!



It reads like the plot of a best-seller: Young mother fights to keep her family's life "normal" after her youngest son is diagnosed with an incurable disease. In this story, the main characters are best-selling author Brenda Novak, wife of Ted and mother of five, who has penned more than 35 books, and her youngest son, Thad, who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at age 5.

In the latest chapter, the protagonists are moving in the right direction: Mom Brenda is doing what she loves best and has raised more than \$1 million to help find a cure. And Thad, now 14, is a typical teen, doing homework...going out with friends...playing sports.

And for other families who find themselves in the middle of what seems like a scary work of nonfiction, Brenda offers this first-person advice:

### Give choices when you can.

"If your child feels he has no say in health decisions, he'll rebel," says Novak. But don't make the mistake of asking his input when he really doesn't have a choice. For example, there's no sense asking "Do you want to check your glucose level?" Instead, present options regarding some aspects of diet. If your child is going to a party, say, offer him a choice like this: "Today, you can pick between cake and ice cream."

**Learn to be a spin doctor.** "I always put a positive twist on any negatives," says Brenda. If Thad's blood sugar reading is bad, "I'll say, 'At least you know what it is so you can correct it.'" The same with insulin shots: "I'll say, 'Thank God we have these needles and this insulin. This lets you live a normal life. I think it's made him realize that without these tools, life could be scary.'"

### Avoid being overprotective.

You can't watch over your child 24/7. He must learn to manage his illness to live fully. "I'm not saying you should turn your back on your child," says Brenda. While many doctors tell parents it's not essential to check numbers during the night, Brenda can't help herself. "I'm up twice a night. There are too many variables—like sports practices—that affect his insulin needs. I refuse to take a risk."

Yet she's a big proponent of giving kids the tools they need to manage on their own. "It's priceless." For example, Brenda reports that while her son was adept at managing his pump at an early age, he still relies on her for counting carbs. "He'll get his meal ready, say, breakfast, and ask,


'How much do you think, Mom?'

I'd recommend that kids start counting carbs at an early age.

### Did you know?

Roughly 35 kids a day are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, according to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

If he looks it up himself and he's had one high-carb food, it helps him decide whether it's worth having another or waiting until later in the day."

**Balance the whole family's needs.** "We play volleyball and basketball, go jogging and mountain biking—together," Brenda says. It's important to support one another but also be mindful of individual needs. "Thad's brothers and sisters feel they shouldn't be restricted from eating carbs if they don't have diabetes. I can't argue. So we stay very, very active because exercise helps him—and us." 

—Rita Guarna

## Shop for a cure!

Afternoon tea at the Plaza Hotel in New York City with Meg Cabot, author of *Princess Diaries*.

VIP tickets to Celine Dion's upcoming Las Vegas show.

A tanzanite ring.

These are just three of the items on the

block at Brenda Novak's online auction benefiting the Diabetes Research Institute at the University of Miami. Novak has raised more than \$1 million thus far. "It's a way to fight back against this disease," says Brenda. Bidding begins on May 1, 2011, and runs through May 31 ([brendanovak.com](http://brendanovak.com)).

