

Diabetes clinic still kicking goals

When Brad Miller was a 15-year-old Horsham College student, his mother Jenny complained about him leaving the toilet light on at night.

Brad told her he was going there that often during the night that it was easier to just leave the light on.

"I think I've got diabetes," he added.

His comment switched a light on with his mother as well so she arranged for Brad to be tested and sure enough the simple test disclosed that his blood sugar reading was 24.4.

Suddenly this healthy, active young sports star had his world rocked. His life was to be as a type one diabetic, relying on a daily series of insulin injections and blood sugar tests combined with a healthy diet.

After the diagnosis was confirmed, Brad was stabilised at the hospital where he consoled his mother who took the news hard.

"Mum was pretty upset but as far as I was concerned, this is the card I was dealt and there were people out there far worse off than me," Brad said.

"My diabetes doctor was Dr Fergus - Dr Fergus Cameron from Royal Children's Hospital - and he was surprised that I had diagnosed myself but soon after I also diagnosed my schoolmate, Luke Jackson," he said.

"Every time I saw Luke at school, he had a bottle of coke in his hand. I asked him a few pertinent questions and suggested I test him.

"He showed a reading of 28 and had to go straight to the hospital where he was also stabilised."

Brad said being admitted to hospital to be stabilised was an experience

he'd never forget.

"I recall being woken during the middle of the night to have my finger pricked for blood sugar testing and then being poked in the abdomen with a needle with insulin - Actrapid was the fast acting insulin of choice at that time.

For someone just entering their teen years, type one diabetes is a frightening, life changing experience and while Brad was reticent about his medical condition, he wasn't ignorant of it. Brad's close mate Matt Lovel had already been living with the condition since he was 11 so he knew to a degree what was involved.

But mates will only share so much. What was vitally important to Brad's progress was the support of Wimmera Health Care Group's diabetes educator Lynne Fraser.

"Lynne was sensational both for support at the initial diagnosis phase and education of the condition," Brad said.

"Most important for me, was the education of the different food groups and the effects they have on your levels, especially when preparing for sport.

"I remember talking to Dr Fergus about my condition, he would conduct my HBAIC (3 month average) and we'd talk about all the sports I played. I recall him telling me he wanted to take me to Melbourne, hold me up and say, 'this is what you can do as a diabetic!'"

"I think he was a little frustrated by kids using diabetes as a cop out.

"As with type two diabetes, sport



ON THE CARDS:

former Horsham College student Brad Miller overcame the shock of a diabetes diagnosis to go on to set a Wimmera Football League goalkicking record and play senior football for Perth Demons in the West Australian Football League, featured here on the league's official supporters' card set.

Picture: CONTRIBUTED

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he would be able to continue his sporting life as long as he looked after himself and watched his diet. They proved to be right.

A week after Brad's 21st birthday, he kicked 22 goals playing for Horsham United seniors at Nhill, breaking a Wimmera League record that had stood for 75 years.

Brad went on to kick more than 100 goals that year and the following year before being signed to play for Perth Football Club in the WAFL. Brad believes diabetes has had little effect on his sport because he has been able to control it well with his diet and fitness.

When Brad was first diagnosed, his immediate thought was for all the great foods he would never be able to eat again. In fact he had a Mars Bar on the way to the hospital in case it was his last.

"To be honest, my diet was pretty good and I only had a moderate alteration to make," Brad said.

"You can still treat yourself but in moderation. I believe now at the age of 25, my understanding of my body, my insulin sensitivity and the food I am eating allows me to eat a variety of foods, while maintaining a consistent reading.

"A slice of birthday cake for me is an extra 12-14 units of Novorapid with my usual 12-unit dose with dinner. I actually vary each dosage of Novorapid depending on what I am eating that day or night. More carbs might mean more Novorapid. A salad and steak might halve my dosage down to about 6-8. You learn this as you go."

Brad believes his diabetes education has made his road so much easier to ride and though he now lives and works in Melbourne, he was pleased to hear the clinic was still an integral part of the Horsham health community and that Lynne was still at the helm.

The diabetes clinic is celebrating 10 years of operation this month. When it first opened it had eight children for patients and now it has 60. Dr Fergus is now associate professor at RCH's endocrinology and diabetes unit and he still visits Horsham's clinic monthly but he brings two other doctors with him now.