

Diabetes Patient Appreciates Support from AMH

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ALTON - While COVID-19 was the disease that made all the news in 2020, for Matt Contarino it was something that unfortunately is much more familiar – diabetes. The 60-year-old Alton resident was diagnosed after a routine exam that year at Family Physicians of Bethalto with Denise Schleeper, FNP.

From there, however, Matt has things under control – and he owes a huge debt of gratitude to the diabetes educators at Alton Memorial Hospital.

“I felt fortunate in the fact that I was the only one in my immediate family who did not have diabetes,” Contarino said. “Denise confirmed through my labs that I did, and she was very proactive with me, as I had thousands of questions in my head. She suggested that I contact the AMH Diabetes Management Center. I called immediately. The timing was perfect. I was signed up to start the very next month.”

Naomi Ward, registered dietitian at AMH, contacted Matt prior to classes starting to discuss his eating habits and set up his one-on-one visit with her.

“I was so thankful that I didn’t need to ‘give up’ any foods,” said Contarino, who works for United Access, a company that makes vehicles for those with disabilities. “I’m Italian, so I have to have my noodles. But Naomi educated me on portioning, times of day to eat certain items, consistent carb counting, overall nutrition and exercise. That by itself was eye opening and wonderful. The takeaway there is portions and watching my carbohydrate intake. I wish I had learned that earlier in my life.”

After meeting with Ward, Contarino started the first of four recommended in-house classes with Kristin Cloninger, Kathy Ridenhour and Ward in the Diabetes Education classroom. Cloninger started the class by letting patients know where they were with diabetes, then she discussed where they wanted to be and she left time for any questions or fears one might have.

“This is where I expressed my feelings of fear of the unknown, such as thoughts of having to take insulin, kidney function etc.,” Contarino said. “Kristin assured each of us that these items would be addressed in the upcoming classes.

“By using visual aids and handouts, with Kristin’s knowledge and education, a calmness came over me as everything I was afraid of was explained. This helped me to see how and why all of these steps, worked together to treat my diabetes.”

Contarino said that Ridenhour played a vital role as she offered support and set-up for classes. She explained how our lunches were made specifically as part of the nutrition education that was taught by the dietitian.

“This was their way of showing us how to carb count through the food they fed us weekly,” Contarino said. “When my classes were near the end, all three of these educators offered to start an online support group where we would meet monthly virtually. “As I was continuing my desire to learn how to live and maintain my life with diabetes, these meetings have proven beneficial for such things as sharing recipes, using low carb items, and expressing ideas we would like to discuss in the future.”

As a result, Contarino’s A1C has dropped from 8.9 to under 7, and he has lost 30 pounds since his diagnosis.

“I’m taking frequent walks to meet my exercise goals,” he said. “This all happened in a six-month time frame. I know none of this would have been possible without the support I have had from the Diabetes Management team at Alton Memorial Hospital.”