



Women diabetics facing themselves



6

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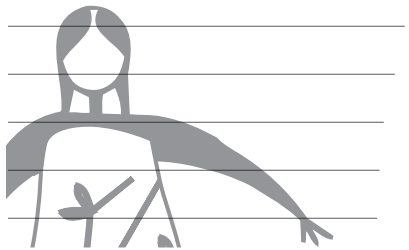
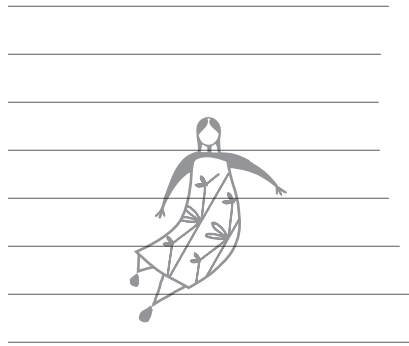


Theme 6: Women diabetics facing themselves



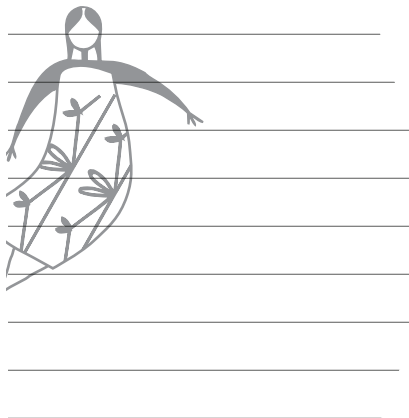
For 30 years, we didn't hear diabetes talked about in this village. Now, from year to year, Mary has found that diabetes has not stopped increasing in the community, especially among women. Even the young are beginning to be affected by this illness in a way that one would usually see among the older people. Diabetic herself from the time she was small, she attributes the diabetes in her village to a diet rich in fat and to the settled way of life in which people had forgotten how to move. Before, when someone was found to be diabetic, no one knew the cause. Even the doctors at that time said that it was unavoidable. She would have liked to have known how to avoid diabetes, and been inspired to take care of herself in the way that she did now. In fact, she believed that if each person would take care of themselves psychologically and physically, they could avoid diabetes or at least better control it. To bring about the change in behaviour, people would need to become aware of what was important. Neither nurses nor others involved are going to change behaviours, but the community. For Mary, the means by which one is going to control their diabetes is really a question of attitude: try to help yourself, to take charge of yourself. We must learn to love and respect ourselves, but also to behave in a way that will earn the respect of others. After someone loses a lot of weight, we constantly make negative comments: she looks sick, her clothes are too big. Men say the same thing, that she's no longer attractive... She would repeat to herself that she would get there. Everything that she had inside her that was negative, she let go—even if sometimes she missed the positive side of being big. Her husband was there to support and to tell her that he found her beautiful at her new weight, and the young ones also told her, "you're beautiful, and you're smiling." But perhaps the most important thing was that she loved herself like that. She even got to the point of even thinking, that underneath it all, it was thanks to the diabetes that she lost the weight and learned to love herself. Having lost a lot of weight, she had more choice regarding clothes that she could wear and she became more stylish.





Since becoming more concerned about her image, she notices that people respect her more. Her philosophy, is that she try to build something every day holding onto the positive, the good things. She takes her time, when she is alone, to analyse what can happen to her while always looking ahead. She says to herself that if she can view today positively, she will reap the benefits later on. In doing that, she will be rewarded. “What is behind is behind and what can be done today will be done today. If I want a nice future, it’s up to me to build it.” With these words she feeds her spirit, which is as important in her eyes as a healthy meal. In spite of these positive thoughts, Mary lives in fear of the consequences of diabetes for her community. Older people have to change their mentality, she says, only to help the young avoid getting diabetes. Today, she would like the resources people to send a message of hope to the younger generation. “I don’t know if it is a dream or something that can be brought about: that our young people do not become diabetic.”

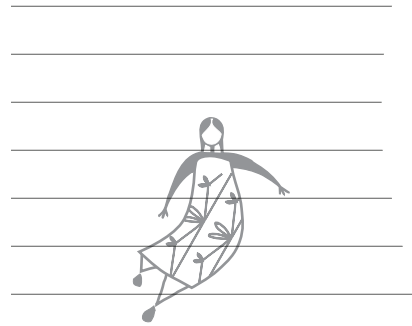
1. In everyday life, how can we create the conditions which are most conducive to our well-being?
2. What are the tools that we have to face diabetes?



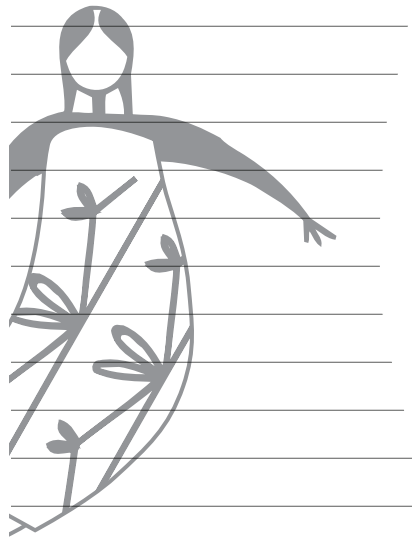
What hits you when listening to diabetic women talk who have gained some control over their diabetes, is that while they are conscious of the fact that the diabetes is a part of them, they have learned much, through time and often hardship, as they have found the means within inside themselves to face it. All the preceding themes of the document may not appear to be connected together. But in reality, there is an important connection among them. What links together all the aspects of the diabetic experience lived by the women met, is that fundamentally, it is in their heads and in their hearts where they created the conditions that allowed them to blossom, and the conditions that allowed them to face everything which, from the outside, sometimes weakened their willpower.



Reviewing the preceding themes

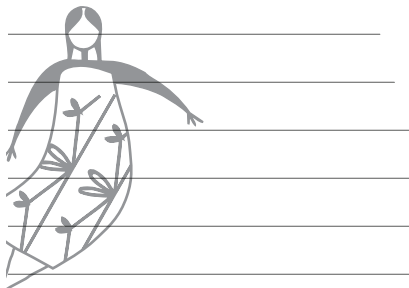
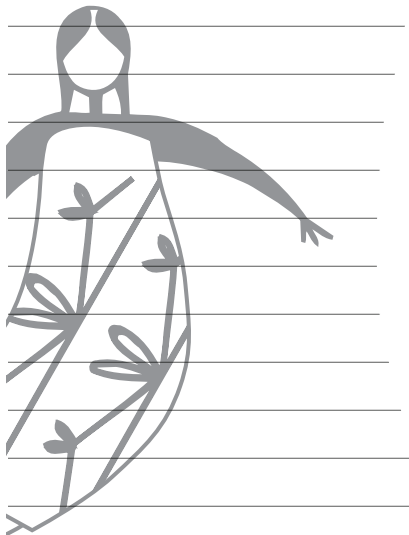
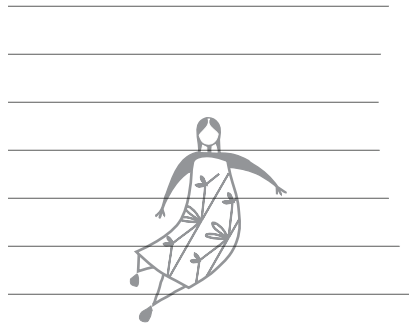


With theme 1, we highlighted that health was a major part of feeling good. And that feeling good depended to a large extent on the capacity to take care of yourself and to take charge of your own life. Regarding the support and love that one would wish to find among our family and friends, we are, from a certain point, alone responsible for our growth and our choice. A diagnosis of diabetes is, so to speak, a point of no return. But that does not mean that we must give up our health and happiness. Health, as the welfare of a person, anchors the family and the community, reconciling the new care that we must take of our body, with the new habits that must be acquired. This new care and these new habits will bring their own prize of happiness.



With theme 2, we highlighted the fact that diabetes is a new responsibility to be added to numerous others that we already have as women, mothers or grandmothers and spouses. Or added to the obligations that go with work outside the home, if one has it. But if at first diabetes seems to be a “spoilsport,” it can also become, through the changes it imposes, a means of self-discovery, finally thinking of oneself and talking about oneself, and even valuing one’s own needs in the same way as those of the family or friends. A changed life, is also a new life, which we try to set up on new foundations.

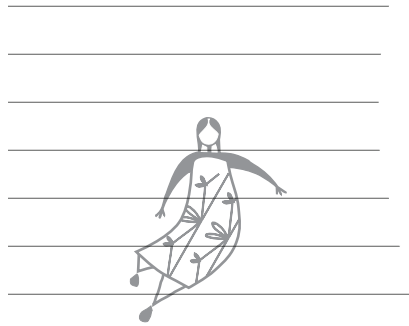




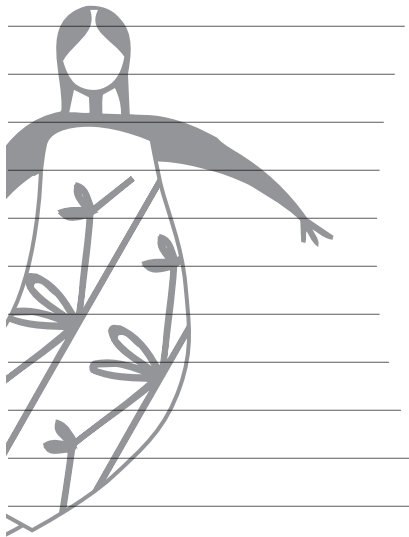
In the third theme, we see that we have a role in our community and our family, and that often this role takes up all our time, including rare free moments where we can occupy ourselves. Otherwise what the activities of many women have in common, is that there are focussed on others: we concern ourselves with the welfare of others in our circle of family and friends, before ourselves... sometimes even before caring for our own health. But here comes the diabetes, wanting to monopolise our time, demanding our attention and even our concentration. One part of our energy must now be dedicated to controlling what we eat and how we move. Learning how to reconcile numerous conflicting demands on our time and energy, and find a balance, demands determination and creativity on the part of the diabetic woman.

In theme 4, we linger over the role played by the community in controlling our diabetes on a daily basis. What we notice is that while a community may be an environment that encourages a sense of strong belonging with mutual aid and communication, trivial events can be blown up out of proportion, creating unavoidable situations that poison daily life. The links between diabetes and the membership in a community are numerous... For example, the way we eat and what we eat make us feel like others, and allow others to see us as a member of the group. Changing our behaviour can become difficult.

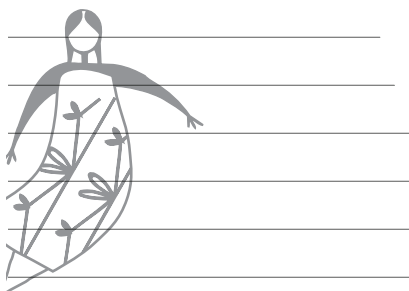




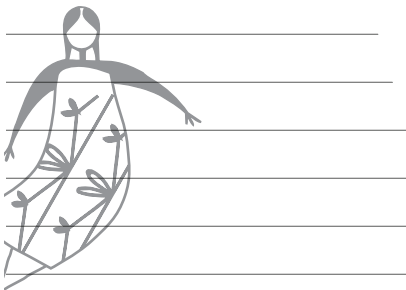
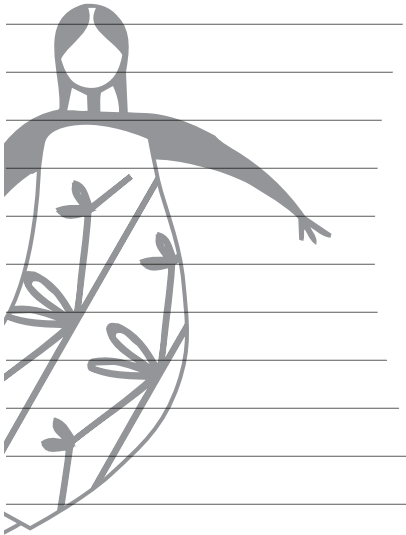
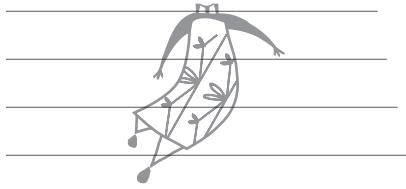
Finally, theme 5 concerns the relationship between diabetic women and health care professionals. It's not only that nurses and doctors tell us that we are diabetics, but they also engage us in a real relationship that can last all our lives. Prescriptions for pills or insulin multiply with every visit to the health centre. Not everyone at the beginning has the same ability to face such demands. Because we are diabetic doesn't mean we automatically like pills or the clinic-nor doctors, nurses or nutritionists! But as resources, they offer us the means of helping us better control the diabetes. These means bring us to a point of reaching our own goals for our health.



It is therefore deep down inside themselves that women find the strength and determination to daily face the demands associated with diabetes. But how do you find the courage to struggle if it is already given up inside your heart? This struggle has several faces that are often reflected in the words a woman uses to talk about herself and in the means she uses to negotiate with her goals for her health. The diabetic woman depreciates herself with these words, keeping her fear of consequences, her rage before fate.



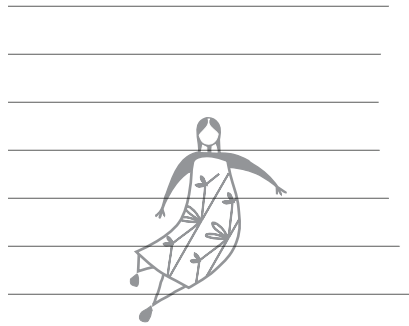
3. What are the words that we should use to speak to ourselves? Would we use the same words with our children, our husbands or with other diabetic women?



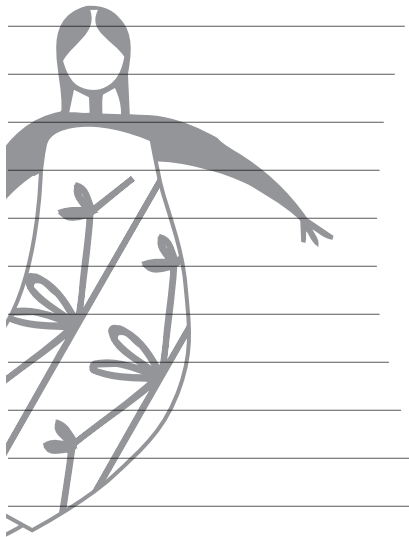
These women will, for example, label themselves as a “bad diabetic.” Or else, they will condemn themselves to failure in setting for themselves the goal of being perfect. They might treat themselves as “cheaters” as soon as they veer even slightly away from the ideal behaviour. In brief, the wealth of understanding and patience that these women show for others, for their children and their spouses, doesn’t seem to apply to them. Like a vicious circle, this poor treatment that they reserve for themselves impacts on their morale, undermines their strength and their courage to continue.



Eating for nourishment, eating to stock up, or eating to not think about it any more?



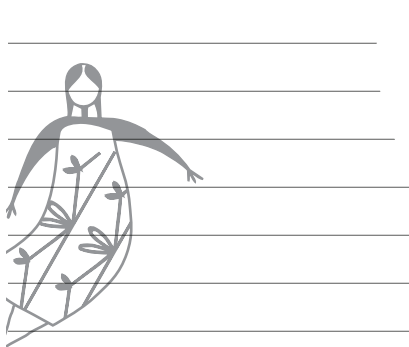
Food has several roles in our life. It's an essential fuel for our life, but we rarely eat with that in mind... and that is normal. We eat because we feel the need and because it's good. We eat alone or with our family. We eat like others or differently. We eat because it brings us together and because it's us. We can also eat because we have nothing else to do or because it fills a void. This helps to compensate for the emptiness of life that we have. Food can then become a true drug, for example, when every vague sadness drives us to the refrigerator or the pantry. It's as if we were no longer quite free to choose what we could eat and when we could eat it.



Sometimes I eat and I'm not even hungry, it's because I'm bored. You know, just for something to do. Especially the young women, there's not much to do for a woman. There are not really many groups and there are not many jobs. You're lucky if you work ten weeks out of the year. You know? Maybe one year you will, the next year, you won't.



Sometimes, when I am not doing anything, I talk to myself and I say, "no, I will not eat." But then I say to myself, "well no, I'll have some bread. Or else I'll eat what's in the fridge." I don't even listen to myself. I'm not able.



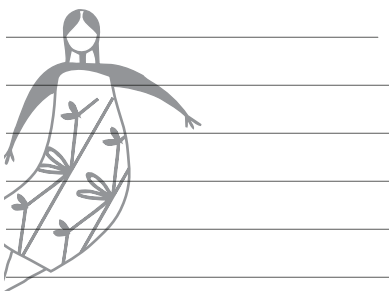
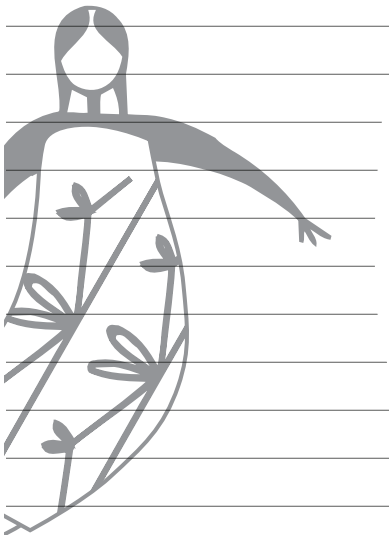
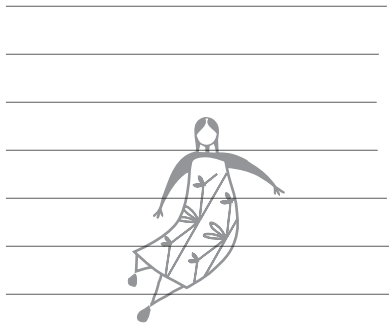
- *How could I help other diabetic women? How could I say don't, when they are down...*
- *Depressed?*
- *Depressed, yes, don't throw yourself into food or something like that.*



I'm tired of being tired. You know, you can't do anything, you have no energy, you don't want to do nothing, you just want to sit around and watch t.v.



4. Do you ever have cravings for food? How do you deal with them?



We feel the desire to throw ourselves into food, or even worse, we feel powerless to fight this desire. The fact that we are diabetic puts a strong pressure on us and we feel so poorly about ourselves that we are even more envious about what others eat... like a way to find a little pleasure in our life. But here is what happens when we start: eating more leads us to moving less, moving less results in us feeling more poorly about ourselves, more "slack," and drives us to the pantry. And the effects on our glycaemia are disastrous. We are starving-suffering from a hunger that is violent and urgent. An irresistible desire.



- *There are those who are always afraid to go without. Before, they would eat like they wanted, and now...*
- *But, there are those who can't follow a diet, who starve.*
- *They starve.*
- *They starve all the time.*

What would be the solution to this starvation? For several women, finding an activity that makes them happy and makes them think about other things is the best strategy to adopt.

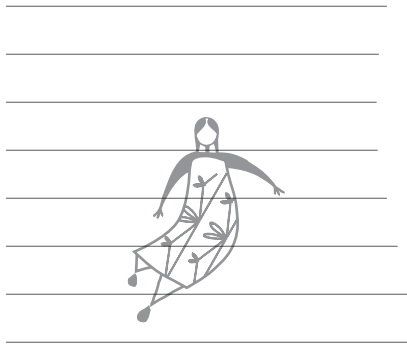


In the woods, I never think about my illness. When I am here in town, you could say that I am sicker. But when I am in the woods, I feel so good that I don't seem sick at all.



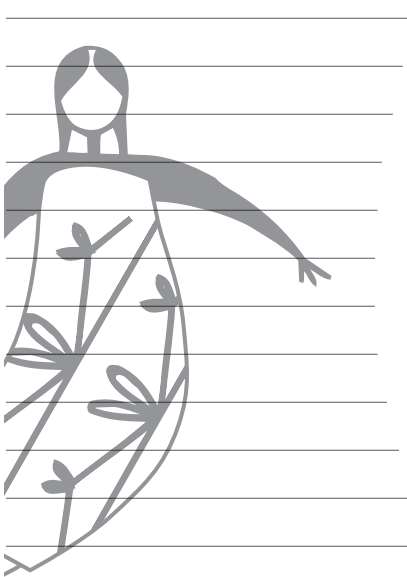
She's been knitting, for a year and a half. That's her hobby. Because you have to start a hobby when you're... caught with something. You're caught with something, you have to start a hobby, you can't just do nothing. You can do so much difference in this world, there's nothing that can be kept from you, that you cannot do.



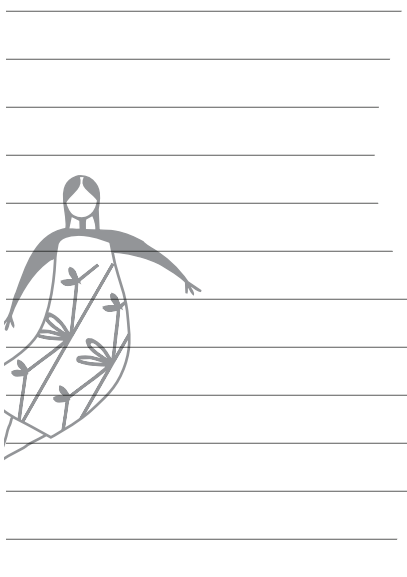


- You, have you found something that helps you?
- *Well, I'm busy, I try to keep busy. When I have nothing to do, I try to keep busy. Sometimes I'll write to a friend.*

This activity is also a way to make your life as normal as possible, like before. In other words, putting aside the new worry that we have for our health. We can't stop doing everything telling ourselves that we are diabetic.



- *It's hard, but you got to keep, keep going. You don't stop.*
- *It's hard.*
- *You don't to stop and think about it you know.*
- *You go crazy.*
- *I know, you got to keep going, going, going, every day. You get up, you got to keep going, you just can't sit there and think, "oh, I'm diabetic, oh, I can't do this, I can't do that."*
- *You got to do regular things that you were doing before.*



You can go fishing. You can find yourself something to do. When you are at the house and you watch TV, you do your housework without... without always thinking: "I have diabetes, I have diabetes." You have to do something. You have to accept it.



You have to be positive in your life. You can't be negative. There are some who say to themselves, "Hey, I'm diabetic, I'm negative. I can't do anything." But even with diabetes, you can do everything..



It helps me, what I read in a book for diabetics. Like take walks, for example. But sometimes, I think that it's my work that helps me the most. I try to work, because I don't want to stay in the house. I'm not a woman who can stay in the house.

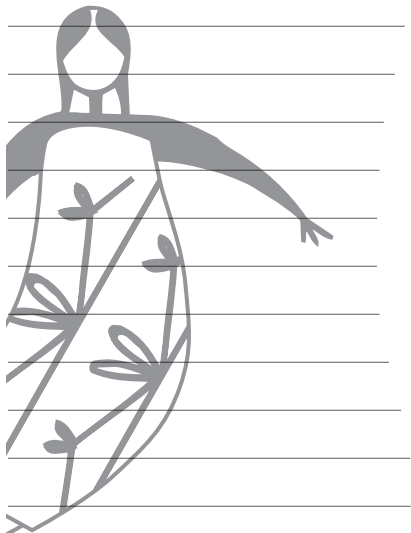


Waiting for a miracle...

Sacrificing for ourselves, facing our constraints and the need to make choices, we want to escape. Escape in the belief that the diabetes will go away if we do the necessary things... We are waiting for a miracle to come a free us from this weight.

6. Are we waiting for a miracle to happen, that will cure our diabetes?

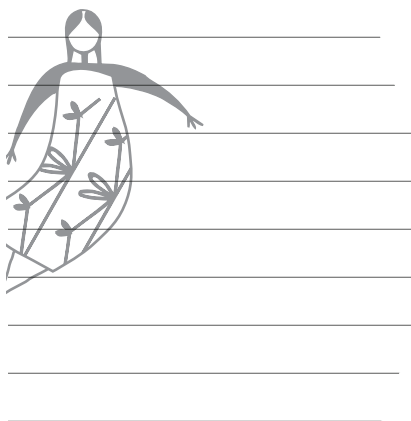
But it is of little importance is what we do, we are only here for a short time.



You just want to sit around and watch t.v.. Or go home to cook supper, but you know if you cook, it'll be junk food. I lost a hundred and three pounds, because I thought if I lost weight, maybe my Diabetes would go away. It didn't go away. I can walk around the world, it's still not gonna go away.



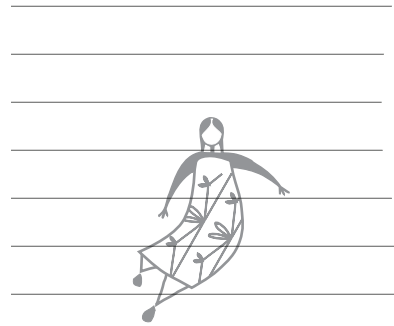
It's not something that you can take for granted, and say, "oh well, it will go away tomorrow." It's here to stay. And you have to learn in your mind to control it, and everything that you do, in looking after yourself, is for you. It's not for someone else, I'm not doing it for someone else, I'm doing it for me. And it's very important that you stick to your diet as much as you can, as much as you can. Because sticking to your diet means a better health for you. And you don't have to go to the hospital each time.



Changing the habits of you live a very difficult thing for someone to visualise. It's a considerable challenge imposed on us, in spite of ourselves, and finding the motivation to rise to the challenge is not easy. After first rebelling, we must come to accept the challenge. We must, however, do it with the realisation that it will not be easy, that it's not easy for anyone.

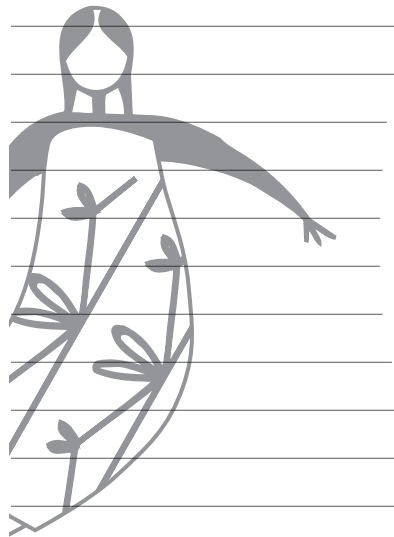


7. What are the difficulties that we encounter when we want to change or break a habit?



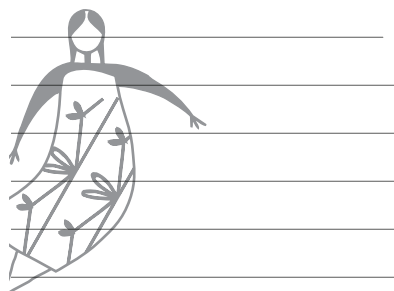
That our habits will not be changed from one day to the next, and forever more, but we will always have a little battle to wage-with the successes and deceptions that go with it. It may, in fact, be as difficult to change our behaviour as it is easy to give up our good intentions.

The way you have eaten all your life, what you've set your whole life, you can't change it overnight. You can't change it overnight the way you've eaten for years and years.



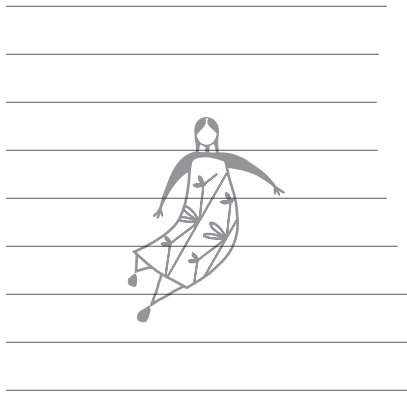
The fact is I helped myself and it's true that it's hard to follow a diet that eliminates everything I like, like cake, chocolate, pop, I eliminated them all. It's hard. But I was thinking about my future.

We can't just change from one day to the next. The process of change is long and demands great strength of character- especially at the beginning. As one woman said, you have to love yourself to decide the way you are going to live from now on and to stick to your decision.



Sometimes I would look at my watch, and for a half-hour I'd go up and down the stairs. Or, if it was nice out, I'd leave my place at 7 o'clock and make a tour of the whole reserve. It would take me half an hour. I'd go back home and make something to eat for the kids. I'd get home, then make something to eat, I'd wake the kids, I get them dressed. After that I have my breakfast. It has been hard, really it has been very hard. But you have to have strength to do it. Or you have to love yourself to do it. I was alone. I had a husband, but he wasn't there. There were my sisters, but they had their own lives. My mother was sick. Who could help me? Only me. No one could help me. So, if no one could help me, why couldn't I help myself? It was up to me to decide how to live.

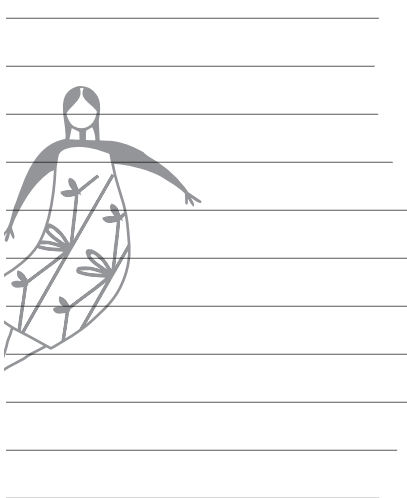




It's helping yourself. Me, I help myself because I know that I am diabetic. When I knew that I had diabetes, when they told me that I was diabetic, I didn't know what diabetes was. I believed that it wasn't true. But I saw, in bits and pieces, which it wasn't normal that I felt sick like that. From then on, I helped myself. And its true that it's hard to follow a diet and eliminate all that you like, like cakes, chocolate, pop. I took it all out. It was hard. But I was thinking about my future. Because you have to think about yourself first.

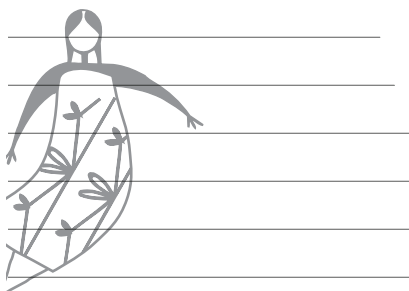
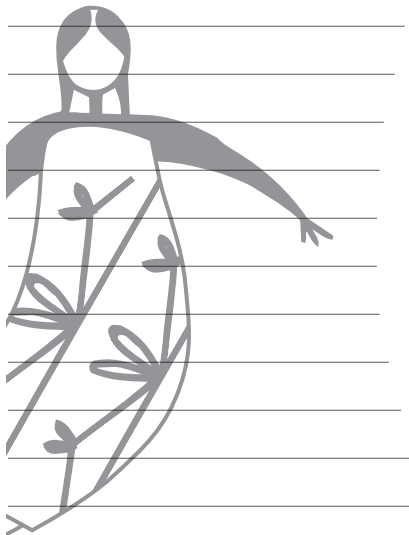
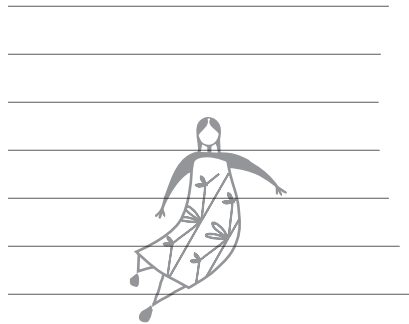


- *Before, I would eat a lot, a lot. I didn't think about what I would eat.*
- *You let yourself go?*
- *Yes. Today, I pay attention. Because I know that I don't have the patience to start over again either. And I would not want to start over again. I have created dependencies for myself too. Those would not be easy to change. When I began to change my diet, it was not easy. But today, I am able to eat in a balanced way, to have balance when I eat.*
- *Stopping when it's time?*
- *Yes. And I eat healthy food now too. Vegetables, meat, food that is good for me. Me, I would eat a lot of fried food, and I've stooped that. We have cut that right down in the family, right down.*



There is no magic recipe to get there. The recipe is much simpler, but much longer, if you believe the stories of the diabetic women: you have to believe in yourself, know how to be patient, set yourself realistic goals, and learn how to manage the little failures, which are inevitable, in a positive way.





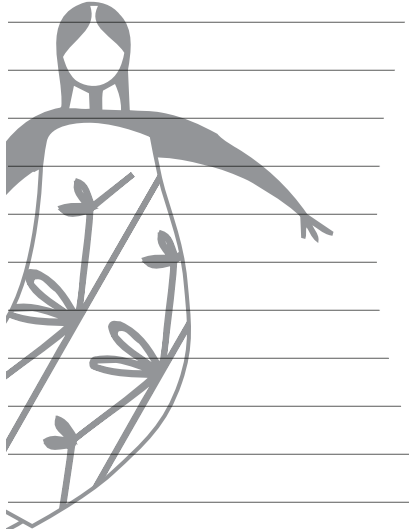
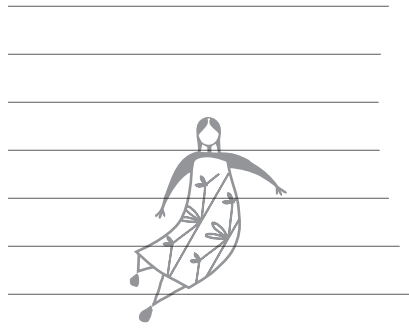
• *I had strength, when I said to myself, “I will succeed.” It was a strength that told me I would succeed. I don’t know what strength it is, but there is in me a strength that, how would I say it... that leads me. Because when I decide something, when I say that I am going to do it, I do it. Nothing can stop me. Nothing can contradict me, no one can stop me. I do it, I do it...*

- No matter what?
- *No matter what. Failure or no failure, I do it. And I say to myself, “If I make a mistake, I’m going to accept it. I’m going to be able to take it. It’s true, there is a strength in me that tells me, “you are going to succeed.”*
- What gives you that strength? Is there something that gives that strength...?
- *It’s living one day at a time with diabetes.*



When you get diabetes, then you really smarten up, and say, “wow, this is my situation now. I never thought I would get diabetes. Now I have it so I have to do something about it.” And something that you have to do about it is an everyday thing. It’s just like getting up, getting dressed and going out, it’s the same thing everyday. It’s very dangerous but it’s not all that dangerous when you take good care of yourself you know, it makes it very convenient for you. The faster you’ll learn to accept these things that are happening to you, the faster it’s going to be okay for you. I think the best thing for a person to do, when you learn of your situation being a diabetic, is to accept it. And once you accept it, you have this willingness of mind to work with it, and prolong your life by helping yourself.



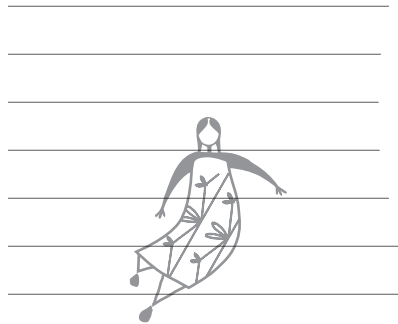


• *Diabetics have to believe that they are no longer the bosses of their body. There is somebody in the body sharing things with them now. And it's diabetes. So you have to get along with this disease you have. And from there you have to study yourself. I know I do. I always give myself little goals. And I try to follow them. Because if you fall off the track, the sugars are high again! And you feel awful. I live like that every day, every day. I can't forget it. I guess it's like somebody moving in your house and this person can't leave, this person has to stay with you, so you have to change your lifestyle. And with diabetes it's the same thing. Somebody is moving into your body and you have to share things. And sometimes, the diabetes is the boss.*

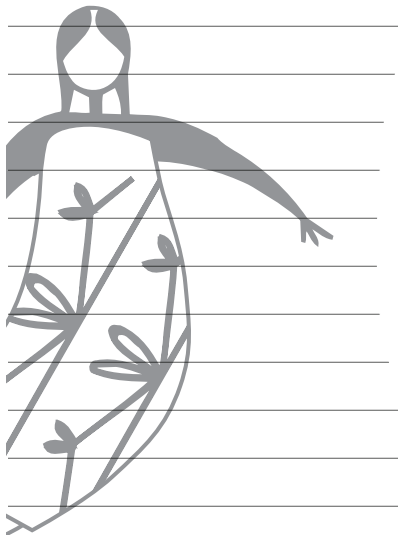
• *So even though you control a lot of things, you don't feel you control it, or do you?*

• *That I control it? I don't control it. Sometimes, he's the boss. The diabetes is the boss. And you're jumping around, when they play a tune, you're jumping around to it!. If I could take it away, I would, but I can't. It's the sad part. Like when you're pregnant. Nine months you share something with somebody else and then poop!, it's gone. But not diabetes. It's there. It never goes away. And when you're pregnant you're careful and stuff like that, you take care of your body. I guess with diabetes, it's like being pregnant all your life! You have to always be careful.*

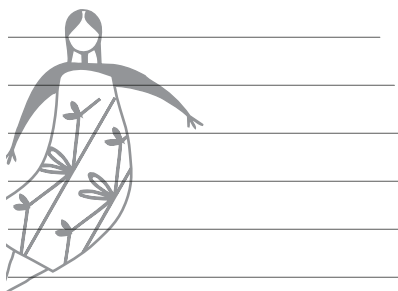




I give myself goals. Like if I'm walking then I will count. And when I reach my goal, then I slow down a little bit, and then I start again. I give myself goals all the time. My mind is going all the time! I set goals. Like I say: "I'm not going to eat today. I'll eat only this and that", and I stick to that.

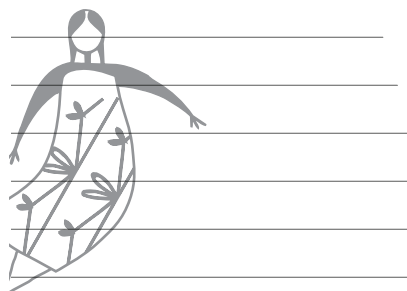
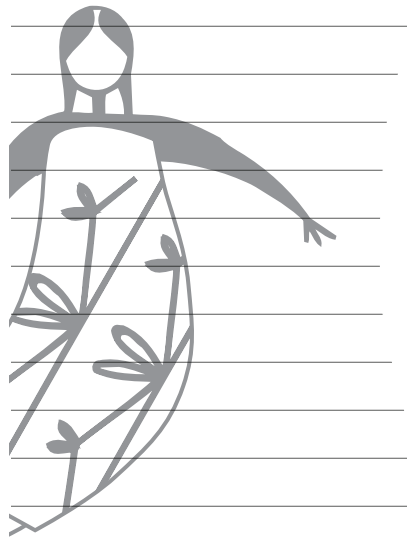
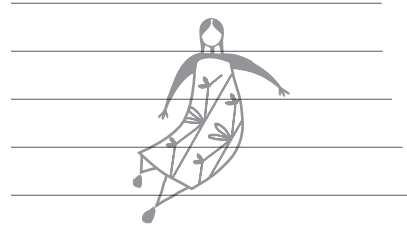


I decided that I would not take any more sugar, neither in my coffee nor me tea. And after that I said to myself, "I'm going to stop everything that is sweet, chips, pop, candy, anything that can affect my diabetes." I said to myself, "I'm going to stop all that. And I said, "I'm going to pay attention and I'm going to have my three meals a day." And there, I put myself on a diet. I said, "in the morning, I'm going to eat toast with Becel margarine, a coffee, without sugar, only with milk." And after that I said, "at noon, I'm going to eat less." I cut the size of all my portions. I wouldn't get a second helping like I used to. I really took charge of my diet. And I said that I would not go get a second portion. The first week, it was hard, but after that, it became like a habit. It's going well.



Where do you get the will power to go into action?

8. What are the motives behind our daily actions?



In most actions is a hidden intention, a hidden expectation, something that drives us forward. Some actions we carry out without thinking much about them, like lying down to sleep, for example, which is a response to a need. Other actions are less trivial, like taking care of someone, or making them a gift. Some actions come from long ago, like the habit of our mother or grandmother that we find ourselves adopting. Each one has a motives, more or less considered. The action is taken, and the motives varying according to the context, according to the time of day, according to the person to whom the action is directed. Understanding these motives is very difficult. Imagine if it were possible to know why people acted. How easy it would be to make them do what you wanted! And you, what pushes you to act?

Like diabetes, our motives don't disappear from one day to the next, and you have to learn to live with them in a long-lasting way. Our motives, ideally, need to be rooted in a will power that is persistent, solid, anchored in our own values and in our perceptions. Our will power must be there to pull ourselves up when things are not going well, to put us back on the right track, to feed our daily victories. The best way to shoot down your will power, is to convince yourself that you have none.

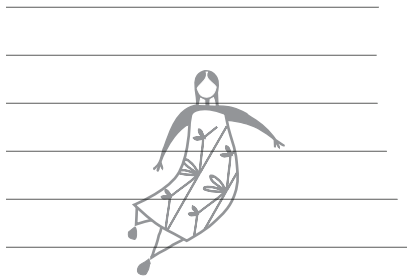


Now, you know what you have to do. Pay attention to your diet, exercise. But even then it's very hard. Me, I find it hard because I have a hard time controlling my diabetes because I lack the will power, I can't be bothered to say it.





Sometimes, my mother tells me, "I bought candy." She knows that I am diabetic, but she buys them anyway and she gives them to me. And she knows that I'm going to eat them. There is something in us that makes us unable to say no. In any case, in me anyway, I can't speak for others. I am not able to say no, sometimes. Sometimes, I think that I could make "sucre à la crème." But I know that I am going to eat it without stopping. There are some things that I don't make, because I know that I am going to eat them. And then there are all kinds of desserts that I can't make at the house because... It's because of that that I don't make them. Now, I make almost nothing in the kitchen, aside from my bread.

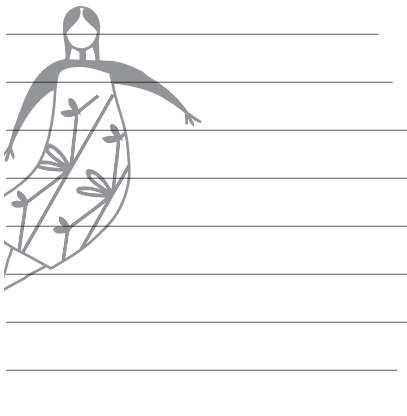


Do we get our will power only from within ourselves or does it also come from the support received from people who are important to us, our parents, people with the same problems as us, health care professionals?

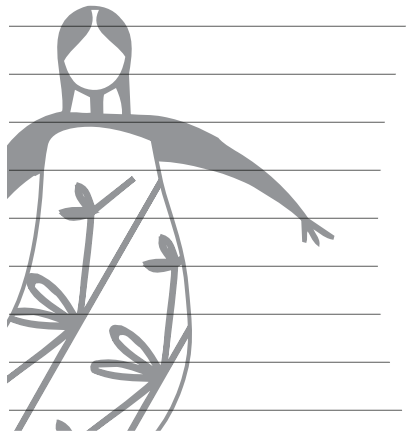
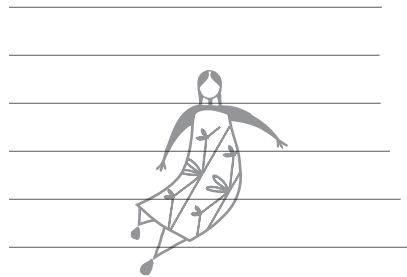
9. To whom should we look to in order to get the constant support we need to face diabetes?



The feeling of support is something precious for many people. The only problem is if we get our will power from the encouragement of someone else, we could be in danger of losing it if that person leaves or no longer wants us to rely on his strength.



10. If my family or close friends can't give me the support I need, how will I be able to develop this support, which is indispensable?



11. What are the strengths that we inherited from our parents?

12. What are the strengths that we can draw upon from our culture in order to build our life?



The support from my circle of friends and family, for me, is a link that unites me with the activities I do. Since my daughter left, I've given up my activities. Because she supported me in... in my way of eating, in my way of doing my activities. At the beginning she would say to me, "we are going to take a walk."

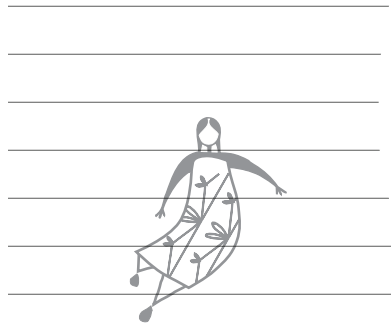
As one woman said, it's up to each person, first of all, to help herself. This is part of the baggage that we have to carry through life, and it's up to us to think about it. And even when we tell ourselves to continue, to persevere, we can't force ourselves to do it.

But taking the will power, growing and keeping it, does not mean you withdraw into yourself. We pull a great amount of strength from the love for our husband, our children, our grandchildren, our desire to care for others and our wish to be with these people for a long time in good health. We also draw our strength from our spiritual convictions.

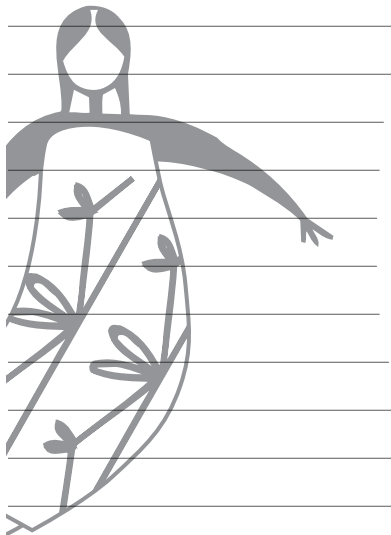


I often had problems and I kept them inside, I didn't talk about them. One time, I said to myself, "I have to help myself, I have children." I always have my children in my head, it's something important for me. "I have to think about my children, have to continue, I have to have courage to help them." When something doesn't work, I always have my children beside me, and my husband.

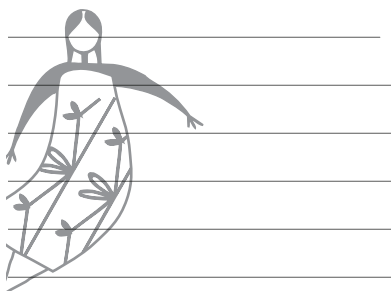




I think that it is necessary that I take care of myself, for my baby as well. I don't want to live like before, sleeping, sleeping, all the time. I don't want to miss anything... Because he's my last, my baby, and he is starting to walk, he is not a baby.

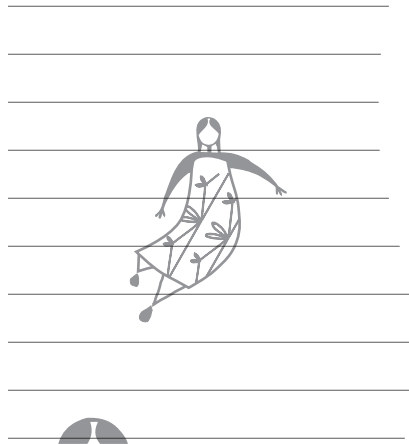


My strength, was in the confidence that I have in myself. It was also in the love I have for my children. At that time, my husband was not in the house, he was almost always absent. It was just my children and me. It was above all the love for my children, the love that I carry for my children that pushed me to take charge of myself, saying to myself, "I don't want my children to take these pills, even for playing." I was afraid of an accident that could happen if ever they took them. I said to myself, "I am an independent person, I can do it. I have the courage to do it." It's as if... how would I say this to you, a strength that comes from the depths of you, tells you, "you have to get there, you are going to get there." I don't know how to describe it, but there is a force that told me, "yes, you are going to succeed, you are going to succeed." I never doubted myself.



• Where are you going to find your strength, the strength that makes you disciplined to control your illness?
• Well me, it's the faith I have in me. I have faith in me because I do the things that myself, I am ready to do.
• You feel able?
• Yes. I feel just... I feel able. Even if sometimes, I find it hard to do things.





Sometimes, the first thing I do is pray. During the day, if I didn't do it, when I'm running into little problems, I will say, "oh! I forgot. I forgot something." You have to believe. Believe in something, to help you. But I don't need other people to support me because I'm a diabetic, because I'm doing it by myself. I'm all alone with that. Me and diabetes.

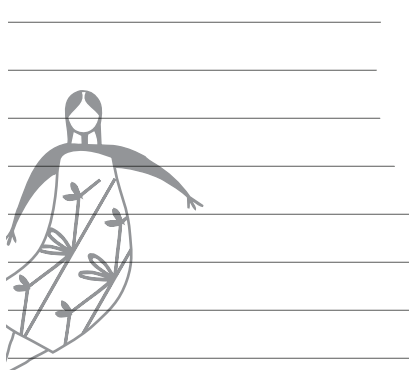
Women can't really name the strength that they find in themselves. It is just something that is there. They believe it, they lean on it, they give special attention to maintaining it.

13. How do we cultivate the force that we find within ourselves?



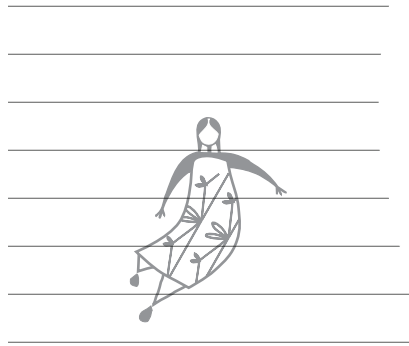
There is a strength that tells me, "do it." I am strong when I want to do something. I feel very strong in side of me. Very strong. I don't know how to describe the force, exactly, that I have. But it takes a long time to make it grow.

This strength seems to encourage them-it's often the encouragement they give to themselves-and not discourage them. It gives the power to decide, because women feel able to make their choice before others.

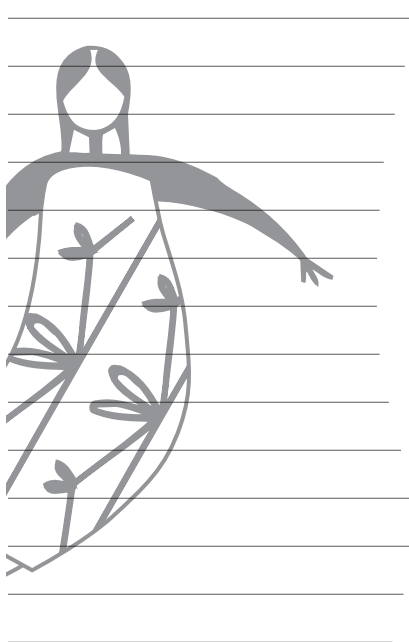


I was all alone with my children. There were plenty of things that were happening. But with time, I said to myself, "okay, it's finished then." But today, I tell myself that no one can stop me from doing what I want, that no one could tell me to do what I don't want to do. Because there is no one but me... I am the only master of me. It's up to me to decide what I do or not.

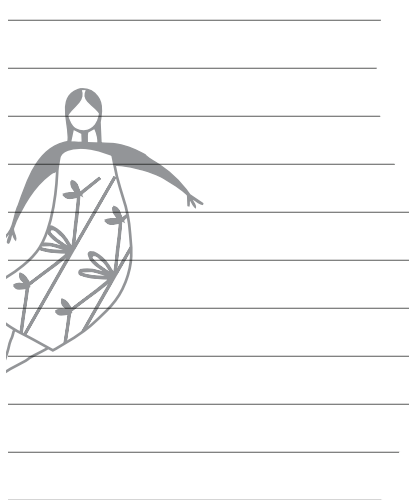




It dawned on me, one time. I was thinking a lot about my parents who were deceased, about my mother who had died from diabetes at the age of 62. I was reflecting a lot on my illness too. And I saw my parents in the past, I saw their strength and their wisdom. And at that moment, it dawned on me, I had inherited that strength and that wisdom. I had applied it in my life. That is what has made me well today. I see that strength that my parents left me as a heritage, that wisdom.



- And, the strength that you have that keeps you in balance with your diabetes, where do you go to get it?
- *I know that I have forces in me. This force, this strength, I discovered through my parents. I see today what they have done, the courage they had throughout their lives, those guys. They didn't stop, they kept on going. It's that that makes me strong today.*
- It is especially that heritage?
- *Yes. It's like a heritage that I received from my parents. Strength and wisdom. I saw the wisdom of my parents, the wisdom of my father especially, who would often speak to me. My mother too. They persevered throughout many difficult things that they experienced. I spoke a lot with my father, he told me a lot about his difficult experiences during his childhood... And I always saw my father as being a strong man, courageous, wise. I think that's where my strength comes from as well.*



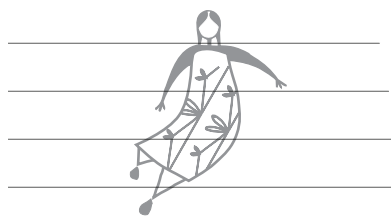
Me, from where do I draw my strength? I know that I have an internal strength that lives inside me. I know that, that strength, someone gave it to me. I know that there is a higher power that helps me.

Keeping the strength alive, is knowing that even if we have weaknesses, our strength is still there, ready. It does not disappear because we are distressed. It may have to be re-kindled, we have to look after it, like a fire. We need to take time for ourselves, feed our determination with things that we like and we do well.

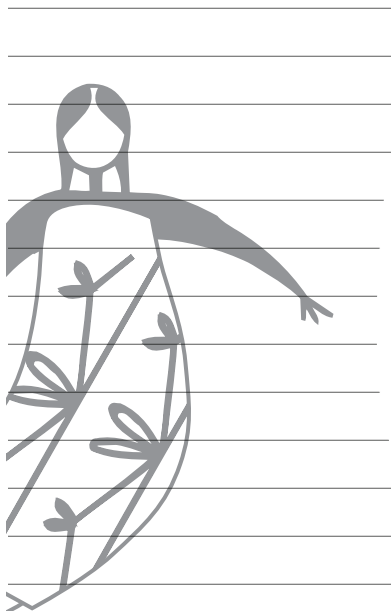




As soon as I get distressed, or something like that, I exercise.

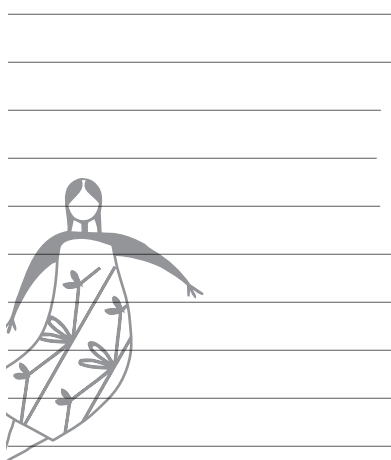


Sometimes, I say to myself, "I'm going to me take the time to listen to my favourite song, good, I give myself a two minute break." Two minutes, then after, I start moving again, or sometimes if there is rock music, I put it on and dance, even when I am alone...



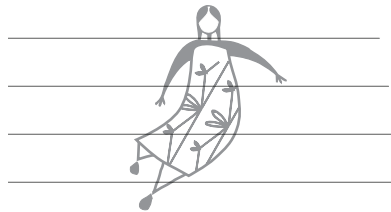
I try not to think too much about tomorrow. I try to do little things at home, to keep myself busy. Listening to the music, because I like the music. I keep myself busy in the kitchen, I do the cooking, I do all kinds of things.

Certain events can bring our determination to a halt, like when someone offers us food that we have banished from our diet. Their words arise from shame or from a feeling that he or she must prove something. One trick used by diabetic women is to change their perception of things. For example, they say to themselves that a plate is not a plate-you don't have to empty it because it is full.



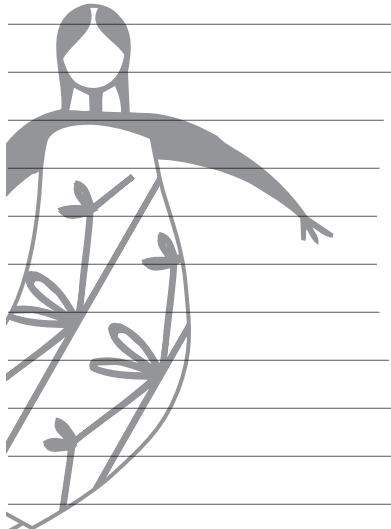
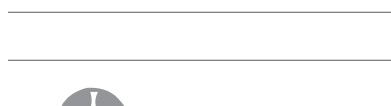
• I know when I decide on something, and I say, "I'm gonna lose weight." I'm gonna lose it. No matter what! I'm gonna lose it. I try plan A, B and C. And if these don't work I go back to A. And I start all over again. I give myself goals. Like if I'm walking then I will count. And when I reach my goal, then I slow down a little bit, and then I start again. I give myself goals all the time. My mind is going all the time! I set goals. Like I say, "I'm not going to eat today. I'll eat only this and that." and I stick to that.





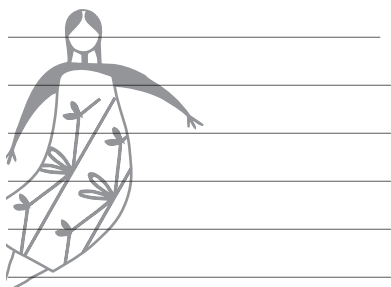
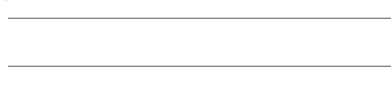
- What are the obstacles? What is the “no matter what?”
- *No matter what you show me on a plate. It’s just a plate. Now. But before, I’d eat it all.*

Like playing with children, you can do it at any age, if you are young inside.



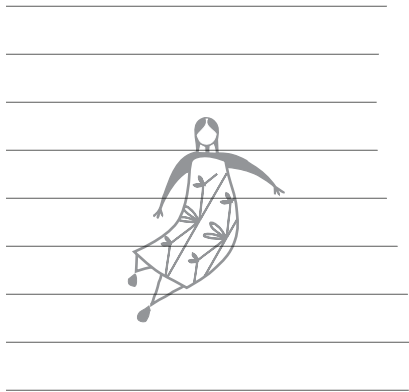
I go bicycling or play with my children. I get my bike and take it out. If I meet a friend or someone else, she will say to me, “What are you doing bicycling?” Or else, “you are always with kids, you still play with kids at your age? You’re not young anymore, you’re old and you still play with kids?” Well, I answer, “inside, I’m still young, even if I don’t look young.”

When there are no chips, chocolate or pop for a snack: a fruit has as much satisfaction.

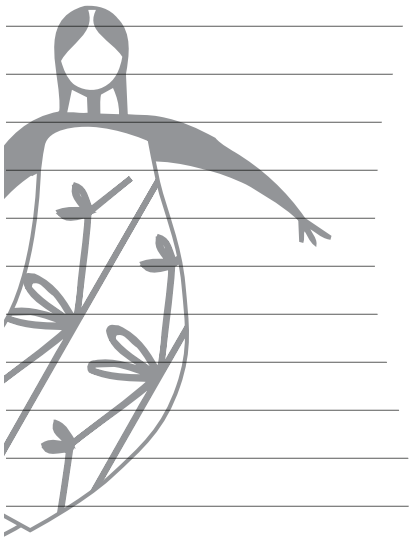


A lot of people have asked me, “you don’t get hungry?” Sure, I get hungry. But I’ve decided for myself that if I am hungry and I really need something to eat, I’m gonna have a piece of fruit. Why do I have to have a chocolate bar or a bag of chips, why does it have to be something like that, why? I can get just as much satisfaction from a piece of fruit. And a fruit is healthier for me. And obviously it’s working, it shows. I’ve lost pounds. So I’m doing something right!

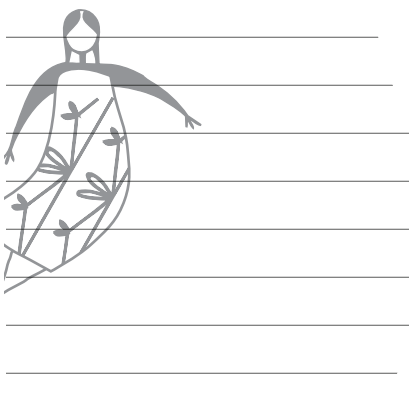




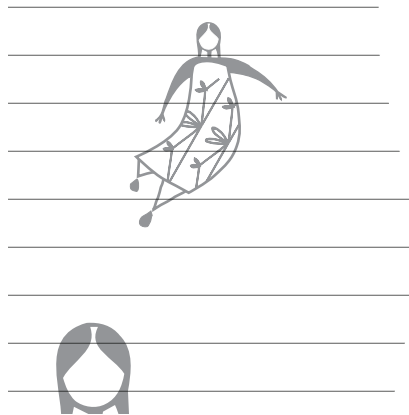
That's probably where I got some of my strength: remembering how I was treated. I've always been left behind. Never been able to do these things. And now, all of a sudden I can. So I do feel for people who have diabetes but in a way I don't. Because as a person you chose what you're going to put into your mouth. Nobody forces you to eat anything. We all make that choice. And if you chose that you're gonna have a chip instead of an apple well then, that's what you've chosen. And there's consequences for the choices we make.



For those who have disagreeable comments that we sometimes hear, it helps us to remember that it is up to us to love ourselves and to understand ourselves. Our own welfare does not depend on what others say to us.

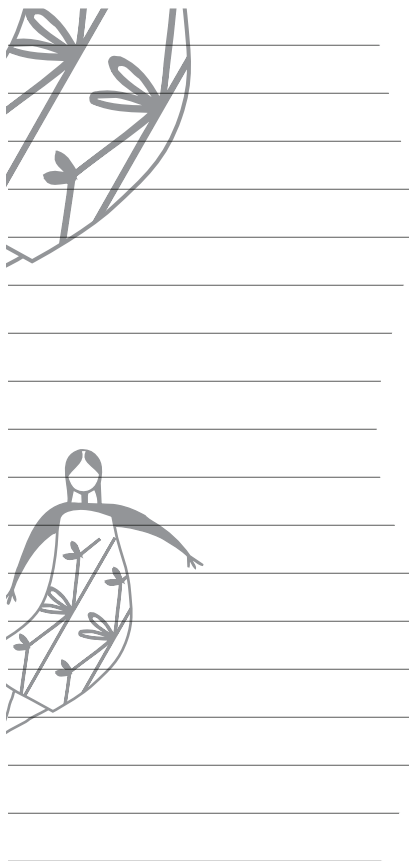


14. Does our entourage provide us with the resources that are essential to the exercise of our right to make choices? (diet, possibility to exercise, etc.) Do we have any power over this?



- *It means nothing to me if someone doesn't respect me, because I am an individual, it's up to me to respect myself, to love myself, to know myself, to understand myself.*
- *And not up to someone else.*
- *You can never blame someone, because if you begin to blame Colette, let's say it's Colette's fault that you are not being active, because she doesn't want to be active, well then, you make a mistake because Colette is not the one who is there, it is you. You have to say to yourself "it's me, it's me."*

15. Does our well-being depend on what those around us do and think?

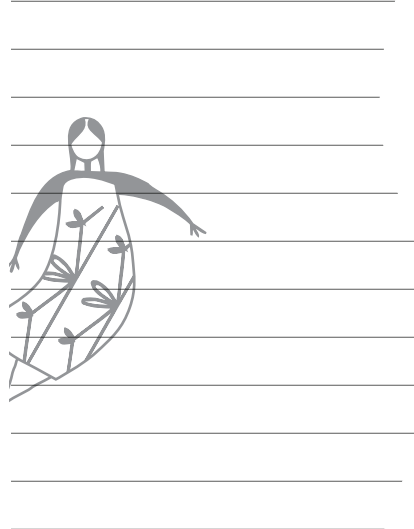
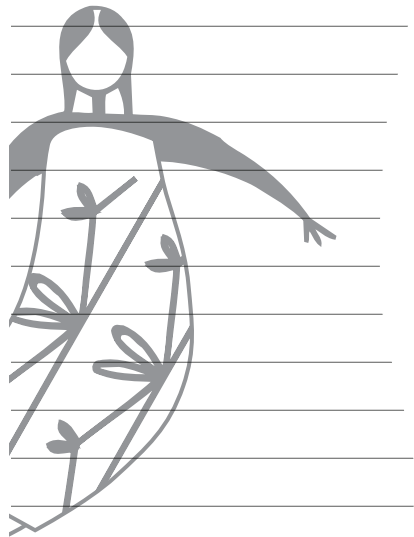
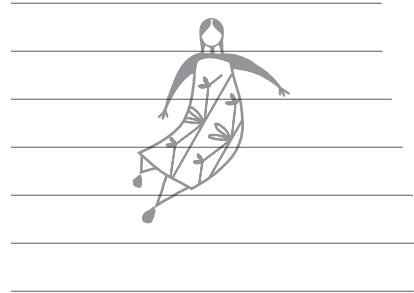


- *"It's my welfare, I going to do it because I want to do it." This... it's the same thing when you go to the store: you can't blame the store, because the store is for everyone. Those who want to eat chips, they eat chips. Those who want to eat fruit, if they can't find them at the store they'd better look elsewhere. Or if someone wants to eat chips, and can't find them, he'd better do the same thing, you can't stop.*



Staying in control

16. Do we feel the need to be perfect and to be the best, in what we do?



The desire to be perfect and to be excellent in all things strongly depends on the person. The desire for perfection is sometimes linked to the desire to please or to a lack of confidence in ourselves. It can also come from a passion for something that we have done, from love of work well done, from the tendency to find an ideal... Do you feel the need to be perfect or the best in what you do?

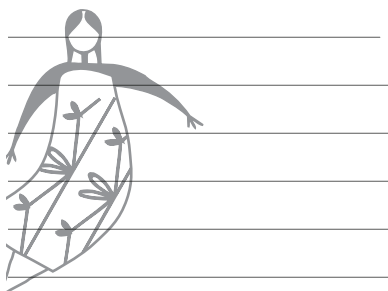
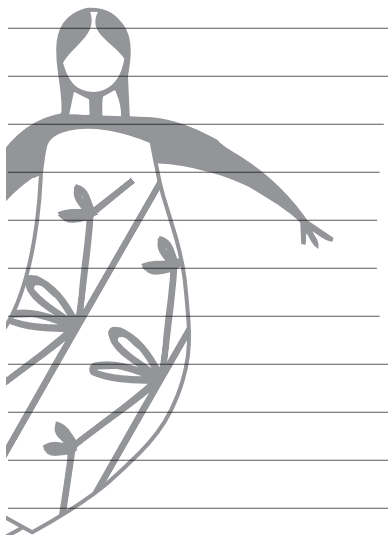
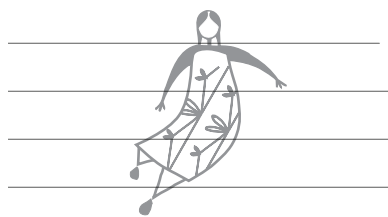
Diabetes, because it must be controlled, carries with it several requirements that mesh together well. Because these requirements do not depend on a simple and effortless routine, they bring with them an instant gratification-for example like taking a losange for the throat. People that have expectations of us, that we are afraid of disappointing. The pressures on our moral are enormous. We give ourselves to these goals and often we aim for what we imagine to be perfect control: this includes among others a diet that is absolutely without flaw, combined with exercise in ideal dosages. Such a goal, which is much too strict, seems to be destined for failure...



- *And I'm like that, I'm very strict with myself, with my diet and all, and no drinking pop, whatever. And then I'll fall off the wagon, get back on, fall off the wagon...*
- *Why do you think that happens?*
- *It's because I'm too strict.*



17. How can we learn to set realistic goals?



The goal of control without fail, further accentuates the contrast between life before diabetes and life after diabetes.

Life before diabetes becomes the “real life,” when we could do everything we wanted. Then, life was good-now, life with diabetes seems to be empty and devoid of pleasure. We can no longer go off, all the pleasures that we indulged in are cheats for which we will have to pay dearly later...

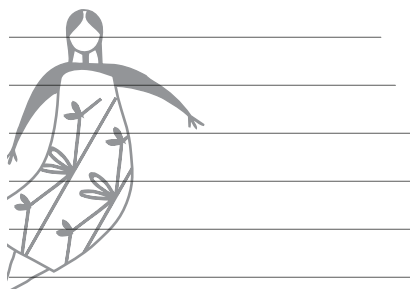
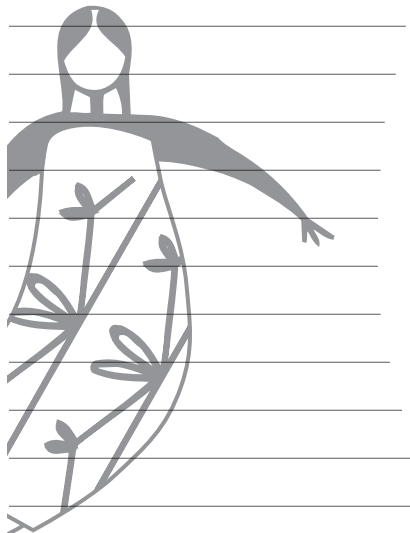
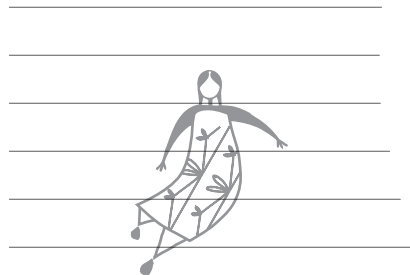


I heard that some people, when they know they're gonna go to a party and eat, they double their insulin, or do not pick. Everyone says I'm a bad diabetic, I wouldn't want you to hear my horror stories, I play with it... I cheat, because I like living.

We set ourselves unrealistic goals, then when we don't meet them we fall further down. We feel guilty and start again with a new excessive goal that doesn't allow any tiny weakness. Would we give such a goal to our best friend if she was diabetic? Must we treat our selves less well, be less understanding, less flexible towards ourselves as towards others?



18. Does living with diabetes mean that we can never again treat ourselves, but will always be depriving ourselves?



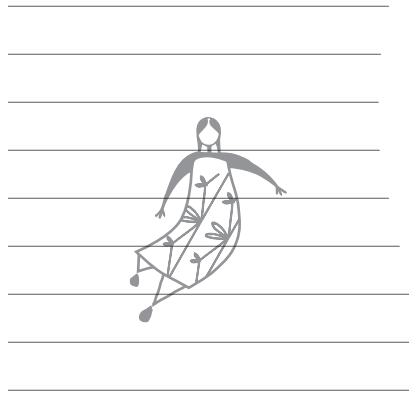
In all ways, living well with diabetes, controlling it, is this really a requirement of us that we no longer go off, that we always live with deprivations? Good control of diabetes, perhaps resembles more a balance that we find, a necessary balance between our need to go off sometimes and the need to take care of ourselves. This balance is found over time. It can also be lost sometimes, for example if we see difficult things in our personal lives, that affect our emotions and our determination. But we have to have the confidence to be able to get back on our feet again with the knowledge that we have developed: knowledge of ourselves and of diabetes. Knowledge of our own cycle also, that which sometimes works less well than at other times.



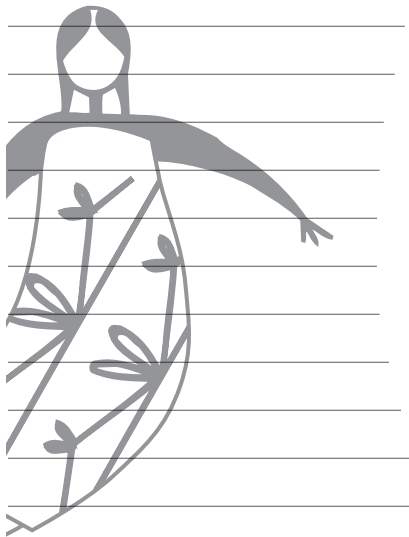
• *For me, diabetes doesn't scare me. In any case, I'm going to die with it. For me, diabetes doesn't scare me. I say to myself, "I want it to be my friend. I want it to be my friend, I'll treat it well and it will treat me well too."*

- *It does not betray you?*
- *No, it doesn't betray me, because it warns me with its symptoms, that tell me, "you forgot about me. I'm here." And then, I am going to begin again, I am going to take my time. I know that I am going to die with it. I will never lose it. But I'd rather, I'd rather have a friend, be a friend to the diabetes, than be an enemy of the diabetes.*





Sometimes, when I'm facing big issues in my life, I forget to control my diabetes. Then all of a sudden I will remember. I tell myself: "You've got to control yourself, you can't dwell on your problems." If I don't control it, my blood sugar will go way up. When I've got problems, I can't be bothered with it, even though I know that I have to take care of myself, because of the diabetes. But sometime the problems are really big and I know that I should take care of myself. And then there's also my family, they've also got problems that I have to think about.



I was very careful right from the beginning. But today, from time to time I might go out for a meal in a restaurant and then I think "Tomorrow, you can't eat like this." That's how I operate, but I pay attention.



Sure, I cheat sometimes. But I don't always cheat, only sometimes. If the children come home with some chocolate, I might have a little piece.



I kept thinking that if I could get a grip on myself, then I could control the diabetes. Besides I never wanted to think about diabetes as something that controlled me. I just reminded myself by saying: "You're not going to control me, I'll control you." In saying that, I felt proud, then I would say. "Diabetes won't control me, I'll control it." I really stopped all negative comments by saying "No, I can't let that bother me. If I let it bother me, I'll be forced to take medication, then insulin,... so I better be careful."

Exercise, keep to an appropriate diet, avoid fat as much as possible. But you don't have to totally deprive yourself, that would be awfully boring!



Suggested questions for facilitators

1. In everyday life, how can we create the conditions which are most conducive to our well-being?
2. What are the tools that we have to face diabetes?
3. What are the words that we should use to speak to ourselves? Would we use the same words with our children, our husbands or with other diabetic women?
4. Do you ever have cravings for food? How do you deal with them?
5. Can we distinguish ourselves from others in our new eating habits, while still remaining with them and be accepted by them?
6. Are we waiting for a miracle to happen, that will cure our diabetes?
7. What are the difficulties that we encounter when we want to change or break a habit?
8. What are the motives behind our daily actions?
9. To whom should we look to in order to get the constant support we need to face diabetes?
10. If my family or close friends can't give me the support I need, how will I be able to develop this support, which is indispensable?
11. What are the strengths that we inherited from our parents?
12. What are the strengths that we can draw upon from our culture in order to build our life?
13. How do we cultivate the force that we find within ourselves?
14. Does our entourage provide us with the resources that are essential to the exercise of our right to make choices? (diet, possibility to exercise, etc.) Do we have any power over this?
15. Does our well-being depend on what those around us do and think?
16. Do we feel the need to be perfect and to be the best, in what we do?
17. How can we learn to set realistic goals?
18. Does living with diabetes mean that we can never again treat ourselves, but will always be depriving ourselves?





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