

# Teacher cutting diabetes off at the pass

By [Nanci Hellmich](#), USA TODAY 11-13-11

Tami Breazeale, 38, of Hudson, Wis., knows the high price of uncontrolled diabetes. A friend's lower leg was amputated after complications from the disease.



By Dawn Vilella, for USA TODAY

When Tami Breazeale, 38, was diagnosed with prediabetes in January, she took action. Now she's close to being out of danger.

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So when Breazeale, a special-education teacher with three children, was diagnosed with prediabetes in January, she knew she had to take action. "I want to be healthy for my kids. I also don't want to spend money on diabetes supplies in 10 years when I can spend less on a personal trainer now."

So she signed up for a 16-week diabetes prevention program at the [YMCA](#) and learned to keep a food journal, watch her fat intake, make healthy choices when dining out and increase her physical activity.

At 6-foot-2, Breazeale has lost 71 pounds, from 396 to 325. Recent lab work shows she's on the borderline of no longer being prediabetic. She plans to keep working on her weight and living habits so that she's soon out of the danger zone.

Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, foot and leg amputations and blindness. Yet 27% of people with the disease don't even know they have it. And 93% of people with prediabetes are undiagnosed, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)).

About 79 million people in the United States have prediabetes, in which blood sugar levels are high but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes, says endocrinologist [Robert Henry](#), president of medicine and science for the [American Diabetes Association](#) and a professor of medicine at the University of California-San Diego.

"Few people know they have prediabetes, and yet they could prevent or postpone diabetes by making some basic lifestyle changes," says Ann Albright, director of the CDC's diabetes division. "This should be shouted from the rooftop."

In diabetes — a disease spotlighted in November as National Diabetes Month — the body does not make enough of the hormone insulin, or it doesn't use it properly. Insulin helps glucose (sugar) get into cells, where it is used for energy. If there's an insulin problem, sugar builds up in the blood, damaging nerves and blood vessels. There are two major forms: type 1 and type 2, which accounts for 90% to 95% of diabetes. Symptoms include thirst, hunger,

tiredness, blurry vision, healing problems and frequent urination. In prediabetes, blood sugar isn't high enough to cause typical symptoms, so at age 45, people are advised to be screened every three years, she says.

But many people don't get tested. "They don't feel terribly bad, but they may not feel very good either," Henry says. It's possible to delay or prevent the disease, he adds; he worked on a government-funded study that found modest lifestyle changes can reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 58% in those at high risk.

The CDC recognizes similar interventions in its National Diabetes Prevention Program([cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention](http://cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention)), including one offered by the YMCA ([ymca.net/diabetes-prevention](http://ymca.net/diabetes-prevention)) that helps participants lose 5%-7% of their weight, do 150 minutes of moderate physical activity a week, improve diet and manage stress.

Breazeale plans to lose another 100 pounds. "I am confident that by continuing, in a slow and steady way, to make small changes, I will reach my fitness and health goals and I will be a positive example to my children and my students."

### The facts on diabetes

- Almost 26 million children and adults (8.3% of the U.S. population) in the [United States](#) have diabetes.
- 18.8 million people are diagnosed; an additional 7 million are undiagnosed.
- Another 79 million Americans have prediabetes and are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes.
- An estimated one in three Americans people may develop have diabetes by 2050 if something isn't done to reverse the trend, government statistics show.

<http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/estimates11.htm#1>  
[www.ydpp.org](http://www.ydpp.org)