

Dealing with diabetes as a child

THE CARE

Tomorrow is World Diabetes Day, which is marked every year on November 14

By Lillian N. Magezi

In October 2011, as he prepared to write his Primary Leaving Examinations, Frank Sentongo fell sick. He started with having a funny taste in the mouth, felt weak all the time and lost a lot of weight. At the time, he was living with his grandmother in Luwero district. Because his condition deteriorated, his grandmother called his mother, who lived in Kampala, to take him to seek medical care in Kampala.

When his mother arrived, Sentongo was in such a bad state that she called a medical personnel from a nearby clinic to first attend to him before travel.

Sentongo says, the medical officer put him on a drip and the next thing he remembers is that he was in Mulago Hospital being told that he had been in coma for nine days.

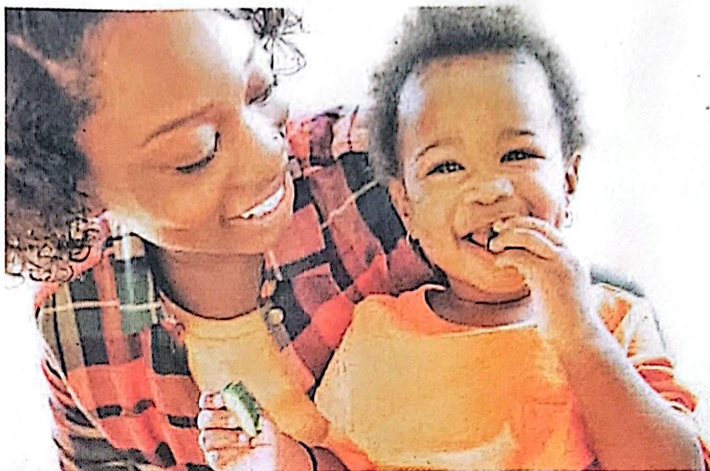
He had been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. Sentongo, who was 12 years at the time, says this was devastating news and his life seemed hopeless. He had to learn to inject himself; at first it was twice a day (before breakfast and supper).

However, his treatment plan was later revised and now he does it three times a day (including before lunch). He says learning to inject himself is the hardest thing he has ever had to do.

The doctors at Mulago Hospital, one of whom he identifies as Dr Terry, were good to him. They counselled him and encouraged him to be strong, telling him that he would not die.

Sentongo says 2012 and 2013 were difficult years as he was always in and out of hospital over failure to control his sugar levels. In addition to constant weakness, dizziness and fatigue, his eyesight was also bad. His eyes would tear up every time he attempted to read. Therefore, it became hard for him to stay in school.

In 2014, he made another



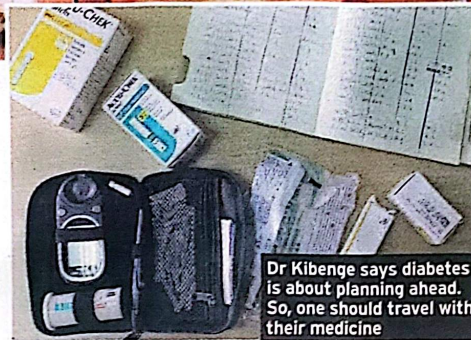
A child with diabetes can eat anything, however, he has to maintain a balanced diet high in vegetables

attempt to resume school. However, he kept on missing classes due to ill health and he generally became fed up with life. Noting his frustration, his mother sat him down and told him to think about what he could do with his life because it was clear that he could not stay in school. He told her he could try repairing motorcycles. His mother supported him to get training in a garage, which he started in 2014. In February, Sentongo, who is now 19, opened up a garage with two of the colleagues with whom he trained.

Diet

The doctor told him he can eat anything, however, he has to maintain a balanced diet high in vegetables and proteins with adequate carbohydrates.

Sentongo usually eats three meals and two snacks a day. He can even eat cake and soda, but the doctor told him to be careful. He has to first check his sugar levels and, for example,



Dr Kibenge says diabetes is about planning ahead. So, one should travel with their medicine

he cannot drink soda when his sugar levels are above eight.

Social support

Apart from his mother and two sisters, with whom he lives with, Sentongo says his other source of social support is the Sonia Nabeta Foundation, an organisation that raises awareness about Type 1 diabetes. They have a Whatsapp Group where they consult each other and doctors on issues they face.

In addition, the doctor also advised him to always disclose his condition to people he

interacts with closely, such as his workmates so that they can help him in case of an emergency. Sentongo says even when he got a girlfriend, he told her about his condition as soon as he became serious. However, unfortunately, the relationship ended early this year.

World Diabetes Day
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What is diabetes?

Dr William Lumu, a

diabetologist at Mengo Hospital and president of Uganda Diabetes Association, defines diabetes as a chronic metabolic disease that occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, a hormone that controls/ regulates the level of blood sugar in the body, or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces. Diabetes presents with high sugar levels in the blood.

According to Dr Cissy Nalunkuma Kibengo, a paediatric endocrinologist and diabetologist, there are two types of diabetes:

■ Type 1 diabetes is characterised by an absolute deficiency of insulin secretion by the pancreas.

■ Type 2 diabetes results from a combination of resistance to insulin action and an inadequate secretion of insulin.

She notes that children are more likely, to have Type 1 diabetes, she adds that worldwide, there are about 500,000 children living with the condition. In Uganda, about 1,000 children are registered as having the condition.

However, she notes that cases of type 2 diabetes have been recorded among children, especially in urban areas, and those who are overweight and lead sedentary lifestyles.

Signs and symptoms of type 1 diabetes

- Recurrent infections
- Weight loss
- Lethargy (fatigue)
- Frequent urination (and bed wetting)
- Increased thirst
- Vomiting
- Poor performance in class
- Rapid breathing
- Having a fruity odour

Care for diabetic children

Prof. Andrew Marcel Otim, a diabetologist at the Kampala

LIVING WITH DIABETES

Sentongo says by 2015, his condition had stabilised and he no longer felt weak, dizzy or had eye problems. He goes for regular reviews (sometimes after one month, two or three months as advised by Dr Terry).

In addition to his medicine, he always carries syringes, a glucometer for testing his sugar levels together with testing strips and lancets, in addition to a book where he records his sugar readings. He tests his sugar levels three times a day before eating and records them in the book.

Diabetes Centre, explains that care for someone with diabetes involves:

- Frequent testing of blood sugar levels
- Treatment with drugs (insulin)
- Nutrition
- Education
- Exercising
- Parents need to disclose at school for the safety of the children

Diet

Kibengo notes that with type 1 diabetes do not need a special diet and should eat whatever is available. However, they should be given meals in sufficient quantities and a balanced diet should be ensured for proper growth. Even during celebrations, they can take cake and soda; however, parents are advised to seek guidance from their doctor.

Psycho-social support

Kibengo notes that such children are prone to stress because of frequent testing and injections. Therefore, parents and caregivers to support them.