

About the Black Health Story Series

The Black Greek Letter Consortium (BGLC) will speak directly to the Black American community about our unique health needs and experiences with the Black Health Story Series. Through weekly blog posts written by Black leaders during Black History Month, we will increase awareness about health disparities and encourage health literacy. Our community

is historically underrepresented in medical research and we are doing our part to achieve health equity. After this series, we hope that our readers will speak up when they feel something is wrong, prioritize visits to physical and mental health care providers to start the new year in the know, and consider participating in the *All of Us* Research Program.

Sugar is Sweet, But Life is Much Sweeter

Written by Arthur Gregg

Picture this, a good-looking middle-aged Brother driving home from what he thought was a successful doctor's appointment. Why was it so good, you ask? Well, this brother thought he had it all together. He lived a relatively healthy lifestyle and even worked out on the regular. As he drove home, his cellphone rang. To his surprise, it was the doctor's office, "Why would they be calling me?" He thought. For a brief second, he wondered whether he was going to die — doctors never call you right back unless it's something serious, right? So, he pulled over to answer the call. In the end, his hunch was right. When he returned to the doctor's office later that day, he learned that he had Type 2 Diabetes. This brother was me.

Numbers Don't Lie

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2018, the age-adjusted percentage of non-Hispanic Black males 18 years and older with diabetes was 13.4%—this is higher than any other demographic. So, when I found myself part of that statistic, I became consumed by my "numbers." Like, what was my Hemoglobin A1C — one of the commonly used tests that average your blood sugar levels over three months to help diagnose prediabetes and diabetes? I learned that on average, a prediabetic person could have an A1C below 5.7 and a daily blood sugar level between 80/130. Anything above an A1C of 7.0 is in a higher risk category. I also learned that when I left the doctor's office that day, my blood sugar was above 400— a potentially deadly number. I am grateful to report that as of September 15, 2021, my A1C is 6.6, which is the lowest it's been since I was diagnosed in 2014.

Know Your History

Growing up, my family never talked about health as something that could have very real and potentially harmful impacts when left ignored. Instead, they talked about Big Mama's pressure pills, Uncle Benny's "issue," and Auntie, whose sugar would sometimes be too high or too low. They talked about hypertension, mental illness, and diabetes as if they were close family friends rather than life-threatening health concerns. It was so common, in fact, that as a kid, I remember putting M&M's in a cup and pretending to take my pills like my Grandpa did every morning.

The importance of knowing your family's health history is quite literally a matter of life and

death. What I didn't know was that if you have a family health history of diabetes, you are more likely to have prediabetes and develop diabetes. I also didn't know that you are more likely to get Type 2 diabetes if you have had gestational diabetes, are overweight or obese, or are African American, American Indian, Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Hispanic. Knowledge of these facts, my family's own history, and preventative care could very well have prevented me from being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, but I don't like to dwell on the past. Instead, I choose to focus on ways I can help prevent people from ending up like me on the day I got that fateful call— surprised, confused, and completely unaware of what to do next.

I am grateful for the All of Us Research Program because it has taught me to be a champion of my own health. I have learned how to have those hard conversations with my family about our family health history, and with my doctors about my lifestyle and my health. The All of Us Research Program continues to be a catalyst not only in my life, but in the lives of others. As someone who lives with Type 2 Diabetes every day, I now know that numbers don't lie and the importance of knowing my family's health history. I am on the winning side of this disease by taking my medicine, eating right, exercising, resting, letting stress go, and scheduling quarterly checkups with my doctor — and I encourage you to do the same because, like me, your life could depend on it.