



2.6 million Canadians = Type 1, 2

x~ diabetes

Sam finds comfort in junk food. He has been a fast-foodaholic since first tasting salty chips and pop. Sam is Anishnabek and lives on a Reserve with his family. The other children started teasing him about his weight in grade one. By the time of Sam's 10th birthday he was in a high-risk group for type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is being diagnosed in Canadian First Nations children as young as eight years of age. So, Sam and his health challenges are not unique. There has been a 10-to-30 fold increase in children with type 2 diabetes in the past decade. Most of these children are from high-risk ethnic groups that include being of African, Hispanic and Asian descent. Given that 77% of new Canadians are from these populations, the rate of type 2 diabetes in this country is expected to skyrocket.

The onset of type 2 diabetes is closely related to obesity (95%). Overweight children like Sam are part of another statistic – the number of overweight Canadian children has tripled in the last 30 years. Sam didn't know that these great tasting treats could cause so much trouble.

But caregivers, educators and family should be alert to the fact that healthy lifestyle choices, regular exercise and moderate weight loss can reduce the diabetes risk by 50%. Who might be the first to alert you that your child is at risk? A dental hygienist.

The most common problem affecting the mouth of a diabetic is gum disease. But, diabetes also makes someone prone to fungal infections such as thrush. Thrush makes white (or sometimes red) patches in areas of the mouth.

Sam was lucky. He was part of an Ontario Dental Hygienist Aboriginal oral health program. Sam and his mother were told about his risks, why his gums were bleeding when he brushed his teeth and how important it would be for him to lose some weight and get some exercise. At the six-month check up he had lots of reasons to smile. The sore patches in his mouth were gone, gums were not tender and he'd lost 15 pounds.

Sam's mouth tells a new story now.