

Meet Sapphire, the Diabetes Alert Dog

Three weeks after Jacob turned 3 years old, we started to notice that he wasn't behaving like himself.

He was whinier than normal and cried at a moment's notice, where normally he was content and easy going. Jacob also started to drink water incessantly. He'd go through two or three sippy cups in one sitting and would wet through his diaper at night after being potty trained for months.

Being Diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes

After the second night of wetting the bed, I told my husband that something wasn't right and I made an appointment with the pediatrician. At our doctor's office, they examined Jacob's urine and performed a glucose test and were able to quickly determine that Jacob likely had Type 1 Diabetes.

[READ: [Myths, Facts, & Questions Surrounding Type 1 Diabetes](#)]

I was in complete shock. I had no idea what this meant, and I didn't even think to question the doctor's decision to send us home. That night, my husband and I didn't get much rest. We just sat there watching Jacob sleep, again not fully understanding what Type 1 Diabetes was or knowing how our lives had just been changed.

In my mind I was thinking we would meet the doctor and then we'd be given medicine to take home.

The next morning, the endocrinologist got in touch with our doctor and told us to go to the [WakeMed Children's Emergency Department](#). At that point, my husband and 7 year-old daughter were very emotional, unsure of what was happening or if Jacob would be ok.

I had gone into a 'robotic mom' mode – just getting Jacob to the ER, answering all the questions and trying to take it one moment at a time.

We were later admitted into the ER, and a nurse informed me that we might be in the ICU or just in the hospital for several nights. At this point, the severity of Jacob's condition set in, and I broke down crying. We wound up staying in the hospital for two nights and three days, adjusting to our new life and learning how to care for Jacob.



Meeting Sapphire For the First Time

Shortly after Jacob's type 1 diabetes diagnosis, friends and family sent us articles about dogs who were specially trained to detect the glucose levels in diabetics and.

I knew it was something I wanted to do, so I started to look into the process of a Diabetes Alert Dog (DAD) and what it could mean for Jacob.

However, after seeing the cost of this process, we decided to delay pursuing it further.

We continued to use our Continuous Glucose Monitor (CGM) to help manage Jacob's blood sugar. Around June of 2015, after having a frustrating stretch with our CGM, sensor malfunctions and insurance coverage, I posted my anger on my Facebook page. An old high-school friend reached out to let me know that she was working with a non-profit organization that trained service / therapy dogs. We connected with the Director of [3k9 Working Dogs](#) in July 2015 and started the application process.

In August 2017, we were excited to welcome Jacob's service dog, Sapphire.

[READ: [Diabetes in Children](#)]

How Sapphire is Able to Detect Low Blood Sugar

During the training process for the Diabetes Alert Dog, you are required to take saliva samples from the diabetic at the blood sugar you would want to be alerted for lows and highs. For example, if your normal range is 70 to 180, then you would want the dog to alert you at 85 and 170, to catch them before it actually occurs.

The dogs are then trained to alert the handler in different methods. For Sapphire, she will bump, then paw and finally bark if we continue to ignore her. This is why it is critical that the dog stay close and focused on the handler to ensure that they catch the smell from their saliva to then make the alert.



Helping Jacob Manage his Diabetes

Sapphire is there to alert us of Jacob's highs and lows, but she has also given us reassurance and peace of mind. There is no machine that has been able to give us the confidence and comfort that Sapphire brings. We know that she will alert, but Sapphire is also Jacob's consistent companion and best friend.

About the Dean Family

Sarah (mom) works in the pharmaceutical research industry as a director and Jason (dad) home schools Sophia (12), Jacob (7), and takes care of the newest, Bryson (22 months old). They also have a family dog Gunner (1 years old) and Jacob's service dog Sapphire (2 years old).

The Dean family enjoys being together playing baseball, walks with the dogs and going to the beach or mountains.

Pediatric Endocrinology Services at WakeMed

Learn more about the various [pediatric endocrinology services we offer](#), and [request an appointment today](#).