

Learning to Fight Diabetes at a Retreat

By Praveen Kaur Gosal



In the battlefield, you might think of a retreat as a sign of defeat and failure. But the word 'retreat' took on a whole new meaning at DSS' recent 2-day 1-night diabetes camp held on 31 July to 1 August - at Changi Village Hotel. It was a time to withdraw from the daily hectic family schedules and heavy demands of our work life. It was a time to capture the demons that have caused us anxiety and fear in the past and a time to regain control over a condition that will kill you if you let it.

For us at DSS, we enjoyed the spoils of our victory when we witnessed how motivated the campers



Our first day started with a speech by our very distinguished and special guest speaker Dr Frederick Tan Bock Yam who founded DSS more than 40 years ago. His mission then was to educate people on the serious impact of diabetes and its complications, and to provide services to people with diabetes. At 80, his passion for that mission still burns bright.

were, how excited they were about seeing their blood sugar levels fall after a walk, and how they put into practice what our speakers taught them about portions and exercise. We also observed a renewed confidence and achievement in tackling diabetes and sensed a greater degree of hope and gusto for the future. This is what made the diabetes retreat so satisfying. Here's a photo journal to show you what we did!

The main goal of this retreat was to equip participants with the knowledge and tools to take charge their diabetes as well as develop a support network. With the help of an endocrinologist, diabetes nurse educator, psychologist, physiotherapist and dietitian, the participants learnt how healthy eating, fitness and mind/body balance can boost one's well-being and confidence.



With the wide array of food choices and the many tea breaks we had, dietitian Lock Poh Leng just had to step in! She focussed on carbohydrate counting – an important tool for people with diabetes as carbohydrate foods have a huge impact on our blood sugar levels. It is also important to know that foods with low Glycaemic Index (GI) do help in delaying the release of sugar into our blood stream. It may be hard to believe but chocolate is actually considered a low GI food! However, Kalpana Bhaskaran, senior dietitian and Temasek Polytechnic lecturer, warned campers about choosing to eat only low GI foods.

Takeaway: Have a well balanced diet, monitor your sugar levels regularly and go for your yearly complication screening.



After a dinner buffet spread, we wasted no time in burning off that extra glucose with a walk at Changi Beach. Exercise is the key to managing high sugar levels. It was indeed a fruitful exercise as most of the participants experienced a drop in the blood sugar levels after the walk. The night ended on an equally delightful note with fun games and lots of great giveaways!

Takeaway: Burn off that excess glucose and fat by exercising at least 150 minutes a week.



It rained on the second day but physiotherapist Eric Ho still got us all on our feet, indoors. Where there's a will there's a way indeed! After all the stretching and exercises, some of us suffered cramps! It was a clear we were not getting enough exercise at all!

Takeaway: Fitness can immediately produce feelings of well-being and improve diabetes management.



The participants were not spared from the monitoring of their sugar levels. We carried out **the 7-pointer monitoring** throughout the retreat and it was interesting to note how different activities and foods brought about changes in an individual's blood sugar levels.

Takeaway: Eating rather than dieting can help you better manage your weight. You can enjoy food again but watch your portions!



Psychologist Yang Su Yin began with an icebreaker that encouraged participants to get to know one another. Divided into groups, they were told to discuss the emotional challenges they faced when they were diagnosed with diabetes. It was not surprising to discover that each experienced a similar rollercoaster ride with diabetes.

Takeaway: There is always a light at the end of the tunnel.



Endocrinologist Dr Kevin Tan, vice-president of Diabetic Society of Singapore, provided us with the latest on diabetes management. He also discussed the importance of insulin therapy in the control of diabetes mellitus and debunked several myths about insulin.

Takeaway: Insulin therapy is not only implemented if you are diagnosed with uncontrolled diabetes.