

Reversing diabetes? Yes, it can be done



My name is Dave Skerpon and I am a serial dieter. Growing up, I actually tried to gain weight and I was able to eat and drink whatever I wanted without gaining an ounce. As I got older, that changed. I went from trying to gain weight to trying to find the “easiest” diet to lose weight.

Although I was diagnosed with high blood pressure and cholesterol in my early thirties, diabetes was never a concern. My parents lived to be 91 and 92 and never suffered from diabetes. My grandparents also lived long, healthy lives with no diabetes. I have four siblings, none with diabetes.

About four years ago, my doctor told me my fasting glucose test and A1C test placed me in the pre-diabetic range, and that I needed to make changes to my diet, exercise more, and focus on improving my scores. Over the four-year period, being the serial dieter I am, I would take two steps forward and three steps backward. During the first six months of the Covid pandemic, I made significant improvement with diet and exercise and was hopeful I would reverse my pre-diabetic state.

However, in November 2021, my A1C and glucose test results labeled me a Type 2 diabetic.

Initially, I was mad at myself for not taking my pre-diabetes diagnosis seriously enough. Then I learned that Capital Blue Cross had recently launched a program, called Virta, to help our employees covered by our group health plan and members reverse Type 2 diabetes. Before then, I did not realize reversing diabetes was even a possibility.

I started Virta on Feb. 21, 2022, after a virtual consultation with an intake manager and a doctor, who gathered detailed information to confirm Virta was a viable option for me. Next, I received all the supplies I would need: a digital scale, test strips for glucose and ketosis readings, and a mini digital tool to analyze my blood.

While using the tools was easy, I appreciated Virta scheduling a virtual meeting with a health coach to review the items mailed to me and discuss the Virta diet and its related app. The program requires you to weigh yourself daily and do a finger prick to check your blood glucose and level of ketosis.

Virta focuses on an extremely low-carbohydrate diet with less than 30 grams of carb intake per day to induce a controlled state of ketosis. Interestingly, Virta doesn't set calorie limits. The Virta app provides a variety of recipes, and I was able to mix in other keto recipes. The diet doesn't allow sugar, which I expected to be the biggest challenge, but after a week, I lost any sugar cravings.

I have never been a big breakfast eater, so I normally have coffee with cream in the morning and a mid-morning snack of nuts, pepperoni, and cheese or another protein and fat. (The Virta diet recommends at least two tablespoons of fat at each meal.) For lunch, my go-to meal is a salad with protein and my favorite dressing -- blue cheese, ranch, or Italian. I have another mid-afternoon snack, similar to my morning snack, followed by a dinner of protein, non-starchy vegetables, and a salad. I've found that if I don't have to count calories, I stop eating once I'm full. That has been an unexpected benefit of this program.

After 10 weeks following Virta, I lost 20 pounds. My A1C dropped from 7.2 to 5.6, and my glucose plunged from 158 to 98. Even my cholesterol numbers improved. My family doctor, Virta health coach (who gives me regular consultations and encouragement), and I were all very pleased.



Like many who start on a path to wellness, I've had my stumbles. In June, I attended a wedding and had a piece of wedding cake that – along with some other dietary indulgences – set me back. I gained two pounds and my numbers went in the wrong direction. But I got back on track and moved my numbers to where they were before that piece of cake. My goal is to lose 10 more pounds and maintain my blood glucose and A1C levels below the pre-diabetic range.

Virta is working for me – after so many other options didn't – and I appreciate Virta's approach to keeping me engaged from day one. I'm now confident I can achieve my health and wellness goals, thanks in large part to the excellent support, encouragement, and valuable information Virta continues to provide.

NOTE: Dave Skerpon is Capital Blue Cross' senior vice president of sales and marketing. This article represents the personal experience of the author, and does not constitute medical advice. The information contained is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or treatment and before undertaking a new healthcare regimen.