

From Surviving To Thriving

A New Orleans Son is Keeping the Faith and Rebuilding His Health

“I’m a fighter. Diabetes shoulda, coulda, woulda killed me but I refused to let it,” said Matthew Ramsey, a New Orleans resident diagnosed with Type II diabetes.

Just four and a half years ago, on a day like any other, Ramsey was keeping to his usual routine of a quick lunch in his home, followed by a short nap. He and his family were completely unaware of his diabetic condition, or how quickly the undetected condition can become deadly.

“Had my daughter not come over and tried to wake me up that afternoon, I’m convinced I’d be sleeping in my grave today,” Ramsey said.

After failing to rouse her father, Ramsey’s daughter quickly called 911. He was rushed by paramedics to West Jefferson Hospital where he slipped into a coma. While in the coma, he suffered a massive stroke due to a blood sugar level of more than 1500. Unbeknownst to Ramsey and his family at the time, he had diabetes: the same disease that took the life of his brother and aunt.



Pictured with Matthew Ramsey (right) is Holly Ries, QI Specialist with eQHealth.

“The doctors sent my family home because they were convinced I wasn’t going to make it. Three days later I woke up; the machines in the hospital room started going crazy and all the nurses ran in surprised to see me awake,” he said.

Though the stroke damaged a majority of the left side of Ramsey’s body, his speaking skills were unharmed and he was able to leave the hospital. Just a few weeks later, though, another catastrophe threatened Ramsey’s life. Hurricane Katrina roared through New Orleans and Ramsey and his family were evacuated to Virginia.

“I wasn’t even able to walk when we left because of Katrina, but it didn’t stop me. I got to Virginia and immediately went to the Red Cross to get insulin and also started to see a doctor up there to make sure I took care of myself,” he said.

Upon returning to New Orleans, Ramsey and his family found substantial damage to their home, but he took the recovering and rebuilding efforts in stride.

“After the coma and the stroke, I was just happy to be alive,” Ramsey said. “I look at everything as a series of hurdles. Each hurdle I clear only makes me stronger and sets me up to clear the next hurdle. There’s no reason to have fear because everything that’s going to happen is going to happen regardless of what I do, so I try to put myself in a winning position.”

Since he was diagnosed with diabetes, Ramsey said he made a promise to himself he would do everything in his power to maintain a healthy lifestyle and not let the disease get the best of him. He began to regularly see a doctor in New Orleans who put him on a diet and injection schedule which he follows daily. Just as the city of New Orleans was rebuilding, Ramsey was rebuilding his health.

Recently, Ramsey received a flier in the mail about a diabetes education class taught by eQHealth Solutions. Ramsey attended the LiPAK (Limb Preservation After Katrina) class at Woldenberg Village, and found it to be exactly what he needed.

“Believe it or not, I felt like I was alone with diabetes. But, in the class, we really developed a sense of camaraderie. This showed me I’m not alone and it made me feel like I could really open up about my illness,” he said.

Ramsey said he learned many valuable techniques to keeping his blood sugar at a good level, such as being active and what he should and should not eat. His greatest motivation to maintain a healthy lifestyle did not come from an instructor, though.

“There was an 80-year-old lady in the class who said ‘shame on you’ when I told her I wasn’t even 55 yet. She was right! Talking to the older people really made me want to live to see my 70’s and 80s,” he said.

Ramsey said he is very happy he attended the class, but hopes one day the class won’t be necessary.

“I learned from the class it’s a very manageable disease,” Ramsey said. “I’m not sure if I’ll live to see it or not, but hopefully one day it will become a disease that’s curable and not just treatable.”