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Medical alert jewelry for diabetics makes a fashion and medical statement

Jewelry designer Susan Eisen has had Type 1 diabetes for the past eight years. She is also very picky about the jewelry she wears.

Putting these two together has resulted in her latest creation — Lifetag, medical identification jewelry that maintains a diabetic person's privacy while providing immediate awareness of the disease to emergency medical personnel. Because many diabetics dislike current medical identification jewelry, they wear nothing to alert others of their disease or condition. Eisen, an El Paso, Texas native, researched her creation by speaking with diabetics and emergency medical personnel. She found out that there are three major reasons diabetics avoid ID jewelry. There is nothing appealing on the market. Alert jewelry they have worn in the past does not hold up to the rigors of daily use. Some people just don't like wearing jewelry.

Eisen's Lifetag design is small, so it provides a less public way for diabetics to maintain discrete health safety. It features a recognizable medical alert symbol and has a stick-on back, allowing it to be attached to existing jewelry, or to a watchband, key, pager or driver's license.

The catalyst for Lifetag happened four years ago when she went to the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston for a check-up. For the first time, Eisen was asked if she wore any kind of medical identification jewelry.

"And that's when it kind of hit me," Eisen said. "I'm a jeweler, and I don't wear any. It's my job to find something that I like. That's what I do for a living. It was a personal challenge, but I found there was a need, a huge market for the product among people like me who are diabetic, or who have Alzheimer's or kidney disease."

When information on Lifetags hit the street in El Paso, Texas, initial interest was from Eisen's loyal jewelry customers. Now, Eisen said, as a result of an Internet presence, everyone from diabetes educators, doctors, nurses, and camp directors have called about the identification tags.

In addition to diabetes, the tags are available for a variety of medical conditions and languages including English and Spanish. Disease conditions for which Lifetags are available include seizures, Alzheimer's, medications, pacemaker, dialysis, asthma, emphysema, allergic and Coumadin. They come with a wallet card that lists the doctor's name and medication type. For emergency medical personnel, the jewelry is critical. "We are their biggest nightmare," Eisen said. "When they find us, or anybody with a disease, it (the ID), would get them straight to the point. It really would save your life if you were diabetic and you had one of these on." — *by Melissa Mac*

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promote wound healing and cytokines that attract other white blood cells to the infection site. However, in poorly controlled diabetics and people who eat too much fat, these monocytes and macrophages are changed and the net result is that wound healing is impaired and tissue destruction is increased, Cutler said.

"One thing that we know about the oral cavity is the first sign of disease is often seen [there], with a lot of different diseases. This is why we think with diabetes, one of the first symptoms is this gum disease," Cutler said. The tissues in the mouth are the first to see infectious agents that come into the body. The cells in the mouth proliferate very quickly in order to rejuvenate. As a result, when there are changes in the body, often it is first seen in the mouth.

Gum disease itself may be able to cause a hyperlipidemia, according to Cutler. This means it would contribute to the cycle of elevated serum triglycerides and impaired wound healing because the infection around the teeth is thought to cause the breakdown of lipids as a result of the release of cytokines.

To avoid periodontal disease, it is important for diabetics to get their diabetes under control. "What that means is going back to your internist or endocrinologist, and asking him or her to measure levels of lipids in your blood, and there is a clinical test called glycosylated hemoglobin and that is extremely important to determine the long term history of diabetic control," Cutler said. Like everyone else diabetes should make sure they floss and brush everyday, and see their dentist twice a year. "Gum disease is preventable in most patients, even with diabetes, if they practice very meticulous dental hygiene and see their dental hygienist," Cutler said.