

Local family pledges \$1 million to help kids with diabetes

Kids need to play and move. It's part of a healthy childhood. They're meant to run around until they're red in the face and exhausted. But when a child has Type 1 diabetes, vigorous activity, such as sports, can cause major health consequences due to changes in blood sugar levels.

A \$1 million pledge to the Children's Hospital Foundation is giving children with Type 1 diabetes the help they need to stay active on the playing field.

The gift establishes the Christensen Family Diabetes Sports Medicine Program at Kosair Children's Hospital. The program is part of the Wendy Novak Diabetes Care Center, a collaboration among Kosair Children's Hospital, the University of Louisville and UofL Physicians.

Tony Christensen, president of ACCESS Wealth Management, is making the pledge in honor of his son, Mason, who has Type 1 diabetes.

"My family feels very fortunate to have a top facility like the Wendy Novak Diabetes Care Center in our community," Christensen said. "Through this diabetes sports medicine program, we will strive to provide children and young adults with Type 1 diabetes the same level of care and process that professional athletes with Type 1 diabetes receive.

"We want to get to a point where young athletes and their families can enjoy sporting events without worrying about dangerous drops in their blood sugar levels. It's a huge need, and we are happy to be a part of this exciting program."

"Our goal is for everyone with diabetes to be able to maximize their performance, whether just playing outside or competing in organized sports," said Kupper A. Wintergerst, M.D., chief of pediatric endocrinology and director of the Wendy Novak Diabetes Care Center at Kosair Children's Hospital and the University of Louisville School of Medicine. "We want to empower children and young adults with diabetes to be able to live long, healthy, active lives."

The Christensen Family Diabetes Sports Medicine Program will provide individualized monitoring and education for children with Type 1 diabetes, both on and off the playing field. It also will conduct research into the management of diabetes in young athletes.



Tony Christensen and family make pledge to Kosair Children's Hospital.

"Children with Type 1 diabetes often experience drastic changes in their blood sugar levels when they are exercising, which influence their safety and performance," Dr. Wintergerst said. "Different levels of exercise require different care. The more formal the play, the more refined and personalized the steps need to be to manage diabetes."

"Thanks to the generosity of the Christensen family, we have a unique opportunity to help children excel in sports, or whatever activity they choose," said Linnie Meyer, Ed.D., R.N., CFRE, chief development officer, Norton Healthcare. "This is a one-of-a-kind program that we hope to see grow and expand with additional funding."

More than 1,300 children and young adults currently are being treated for Type 1 diabetes by specialists at the University of Louisville and Kosair Children's Hospital. Approximately 150 children in our area are diagnosed each year, all of whom receive their initial care and education in the inpatient unit of the Wendy Novak Diabetes Care Center at Kosair Children's Hospital.

For more information about the center and diabetes care, visit KosairChildrensHospital.com/Diabetes.

—Maggie Roetker