

Midnight Rain: The Paradox of Eating Disorder Recovery and Type-1 Diabetes Management

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Editors' note: This piece contains description of disordered eating and mentions self-harm.

3:33AM blinked the boxy red numbers of the CD player clock sitting on the shelf above my head. I'm hunched over, squatting on my bedroom carpet in my soft pink pajama set, pricking my pinky finger and squeezing out a tiny drop of blood onto the test strip of my glucose testing meter. As I wait for the five seconds it takes for the meter to read my blood sugar to pass, I anxiously look beside me at my bookshelf and see the tattered spine of my copy of "The Doll People." I'm 11, and this is my favorite book.

The pitter patter of rain trickled out of the CD player's speaker. An hour before when I'd woken up from the sweat of a low blood sugar, I'd pressed play to start a CD called "Midnight Rain." The recorded rainshower was an hour long, and birds chirped in the last 10 minutes of the track. The birds were chirping, and it was time to test my blood sugar.

55 mg/dl read my glucose meter. The soothing sound of the rain fell short of my ear as it was blocked by the umbrella of my anguish.

I wrung my hands and squeezed out silent tears so as not to wake anyone else in the house up. I knew it was dangerous to sleep with a blood sugar below 70 mg/dl for you could slip into a diabetic coma and never wake up. Yet I also knew to raise my blood sugar I had to eat.

I can't eat it isn't fair my body doesn't need it my stupid blood sugar is just low because I'm diabetic it's out of my control I messed up I took too much insulin its my fault I will punish myself I will not eat I'll get fat if I eat I'm so angry I'm so tired I just want to go back to sleep I can't eat then I won't feel perfect and safe and in control I will sit here all night if I have to I will not give in I will not be weak I will not eat I'm in control.

After a few nights of being awoken by a low blood sugar I'd figured out that if I made myself upset enough the stress hormones released in my body would raise my blood sugar, and enable me to go back to sleep without eating. Sometimes it took hours of multiple panic episodes, and I'd learned to use "Midnight Rain" to keep track of when it was long enough for the adrenaline to have flooded my body and to test my blood sugar.

If we step away from this moment on a Tuesday night in 2013 into the present, I can now tell you how desperately I grasped for a sense of control for eight long years of disordered eating and self harm. I can tell you what it feels like to have an A1C of 12%, or an average blood sugar of 298, for years straight. (Not good.) I can tell you how I never felt more controlled by my T1D than when I chose to control what I ate rather than manage my blood sugars.

I can now define the difference between control and

management, and how these two words entangle themselves into a hefty knot of the paradox of eating disorder recovery and type 1 diabetes management, which begs the question, how can you stop obsessing over what you eat when you still have to count the carbs you eat and calculate your insulin doses? How do you let go of control while staying in control? Where's the line between control and management?

Today I can tell you how I wish someone had guided me to ask myself why I found comfort in an eating disorder as it destroyed my physical and mental health. Now I can tell you how I ended up in an ER psych ward three days into my first semester of college because I couldn't take care of myself, and how this rock bottom experience made me realize maybe I didn't have perfect control of my life.

Miriam Webster defines the verb "to control" as "to exercise restraining or directing influence over; to have power over or to rule," while "to manage" is defined as "to handle or direct with a degree of skill, such as to treat with care." I can now tell you how managing my T1D is hard, but not nearly as hard as it was to value controlling myself over respecting myself. Now I can tell you how therapy and positive connections saved my life, but only because I chose to let go of the shame and guilt that came with the initial sense of letting go of control of what I ate.

But back on my bedroom floor in 2013, I couldn't tell you any of that.

After one or two rounds of Midnight Rain my blood sugar finally rose above 70 mg/dl, and I was able to sleep, in control.