

Free Falling

Daniel Trecroci Jan 1, 2001

“Skydiving was like being reborn,” say Type 1, Josh Glazov, 30, of Chicago. “It established a purpose in my life and restored a goal to pursue. Before skydiving, life was something to be endured. After I began jumping, however, life was something to be enjoyed and cherished.”

Finding a Passion in Life



Josh Glazov Jumps in the Face of Type 1 Diabetes—From High Altitudes

Diagnosed at the age of 15, Josh was told he would never be able to fulfill his dream of becoming an airline pilot in the U.S. Military. This devastated him and sent him into what he describes as “five and one half years of listless depression and hopelessness.”

Seeking a pursuit, Josh found skydiving. He called the United States Parachute Association in Alexandria, Virginia, (www.uspa.org) and they identified some “drop zones” where people could go skydiving in the Washington, D.C. area, where he was living at the time.

Josh was told that having Type 1 diabetes would not disqualify him from sky diving or from getting his tandem master’s license. To become a tandem jumpmaster (a person who skydives with other people), Josh learned all he would need was an Airman’s Medical Certificate from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Until recently, people with diabetes were not eligible for such certificates. According to Josh, however, a recent program grants waivers to people with diabetes who can demonstrate to the FAA that they are in good control.

Preparation is Key

Josh emphasizes that if a person has diabetes, preparation is key if he or she is preparing for a dive.

“The importance of preparation is multiplied when the two are mixed,” he says. “My preparation starts before I leave home. I make sure that I have all the necessary supplies.”

Before a jump, Josh makes sure he has extra insulin, needles and test strips. He also loads up a cooler with food and drinks to maintain his diet while at the drop zone.

“I make sure I have lots of quick glucose on hand to address hypoglycemia,” he says. “I really like Jolly Ranchers because they help maintain my glucose throughout a demanding day without spiking me too high. I always make sure each of my jumpsuits are well stocked with glucose.”

The Adrenaline Rush of a Jump and How it Affects BGs

Josh says the adrenaline rush a skydiver experiences usually causes the BGs to drop. The amount they drop, he adds, depends on how hard the jump is.

“I believe it makes my metabolism run much faster and makes my insulin work more efficiently,” he says.

Josh usually makes two or more jumps per hour, and he makes sure he tries to test before every jump. He keeps his refrigerator at the drop zone stocked with juice, fruits, breads, candies and cheeses. The aircraft he jumps from usually takes between 13 to 17 minutes to reach the

jumping altitude of 13,500 feet. Sometimes, he eats a sandwich or Power Bar while on the plane.

Josh usually takes only 25 to 50 percent of his normal insulin dosage when he spends a whole day at the drop zone sky diving.

“A full day of jumping usually consumes seven to 12 test strips before the sun goes down” he says, adding that he always manages to keep his BGs below 130 throughout the day.

Josh admits that he has had mild lows while jumping, which were not evident until after he was on the ground.

A Feeling That Cannot be Described in Words

Josh says the closest he can come to describing what the sensation of skydiving is like is a feeling of “complete freedom.”

“You are removed from all your concerns on the ground,” he says. “You leave them there and you have complete ecstasy while in free fall.”

Josh describes jumping solo as being like driving a formula 1 car “except with a better view.” Doing a tandem jump with a student, he jokes, “is more like driving a large domestic sedan, but still fun.”

Jumps, according to Josh, usually last 70 seconds in free fall, with 1.5 to 2.5 minutes under the parachute. Tandem jumps are about 60 seconds in free fall and four to five minutes under the parachute.

Josh obtained his law degree from the University of Miami Law School in 1995. He is currently an associate at the law offices of Piper, Marbury, Rudnick and Wolfe in Chicago. In addition to skydiving, Josh enjoys lifting weights, swimming and skiing. He is also an avid reader and enjoys studying history.

Josh Glazov’s Suggestions for People with Diabetes Who Want to Sky Dive

1. Be well controlled before you go.
2. Plan ahead. Bring plenty of testing supplies and food with you.
3. Bring a good book, folding chair and picnic-like things.
4. Go with someone you know. If you have a diabetes-related problem, you should have someone with you who knows how to respond.
5. Make sure the drop zone and your individual jumpmaster(s) know(s) that you have diabetes.
6. Test your BGs within five minutes before you board the aircraft. Be above 90 and below 200 mg/dl before you go.
7. Carry at least two packages of glucose supplements to respond to hypoglycemia in the aircraft or after you land. You will experience excitement, anxiety and fear and these can all lower your BGs.