

Diabetes Information Technology & WebWatch

Website Review: Diabetes Insight— www.diabetes-insight.info

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ABSTRACT

In previous Diabetes Information Technology & WebWatch columns some different diabetes Websites have been highlighted. In this issue we focus on one particular site and use this to illustrate how such Internet-based repositories of information can provide important and useful resources for people with diabetes and their carers. Diabetes is perhaps unique in the fact that much of the day-to-day responsibility for care rests with individuals themselves. Successful therapy demands considerable understanding of the condition by the person with diabetes, or his or her carer, and this can only be made possible with access to appropriate information. Provision of information via a Website is now recognised to be cost-effective and convenient, available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year—and access to the Internet by the general public has grown rapidly in recent years. The increasing way in which the Internet is being used to supply individuals with tools and information for their self-care is exemplified by the Diabetes Insight Website (at: www.diabetes-insight.info).

INTRODUCTION

THE DIABETES INSIGHT WEBSITE is an independent, non-commercial enterprise that provides information for people with diabetes and their relatives, as well as health-care professionals (Fig. 1). The Website was launched in April 1996. Having stood the test of time, it now amounts to more than 500 pages of information and averages over 250,000 requests for information per month (Steven Sexton, personal communication, 2005). The success of the Website is apparent from such usage and from comments that can be found left by visitors in

the guestbook (Fig. 2). Although this Website was originally intended primarily as a resource for people living in the United Kingdom, its impressive content has international appeal, and it has proved a big hit worldwide. So what is it that makes this particular Website stand out amongst many other equally well laid-out Websites devoted to diabetes care?

Diabetes Insight was designed and developed by a person with diabetes. As a result it is focused on the individual's genuine needs—as opposed to what physicians, managers, or systems operators might presume are the individual's needs. In addition, whilst maintaining

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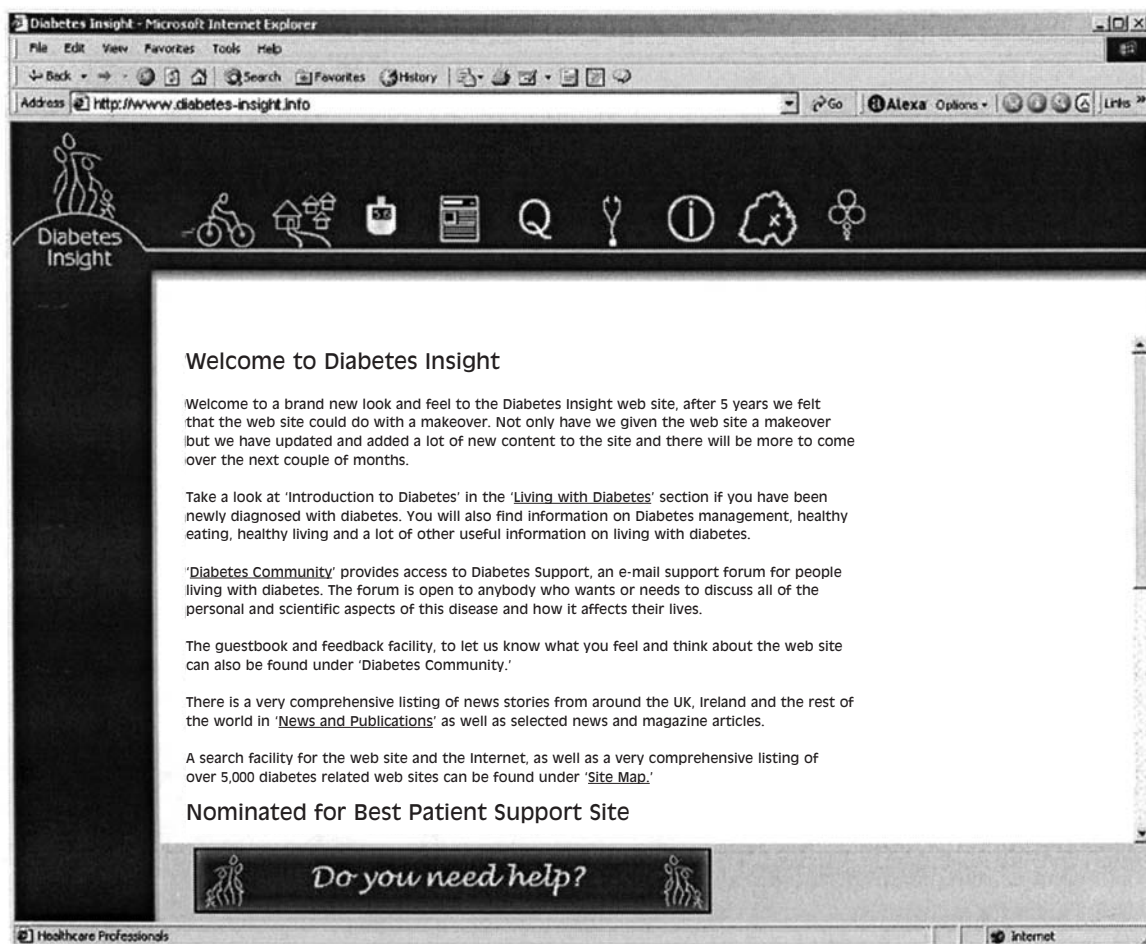


FIG. 1. Diabetes Insight Website home page at www.diabetes-insight.info

a very matter-of-fact approach, it assumes a friendly and personal perspective, rather than a commercial or indeed a clinical one. The Website is comprehensive and incorporates a substantial amount of material—yet it is not so large that visitors get easily lost. It is uncluttered, with limited advertising, and is easy to navigate. An efficient search facility makes finding information easy and personalized access informs the user of new or updated information since the last visit. Tables 1 and 2 summarize some of the contents of the Diabetes Insight Website. Some of the more noteworthy features are highlighted here in this column.

CARE AND MANAGEMENT

The importance of maintaining near normoglycaemia in diabetes is well recognised. How-

ever, in order to achieve this, people with diabetes must have an adequate understanding of their condition and the ability to apply this knowledge to their own day-to-day living. Diabetes Insight has taken a straightforward no-nonsense approach to successfully address many of the issues faced by people living with diabetes.

An introductory section provides newly diagnosed patients (in Internet-parlance called “newbies”) with essential information (Table 1) and dispels some of the myths commonly associated with diabetes—“people with diabetes ‘cannot’ eat sweet foods or chocolate,” for example.

Diagnosis of a chronic medical condition can often be accompanied by negative emotions, such as anger and denial, for patients and their relatives. Willingness to comply with treatment regimens or make successful lifestyle changes

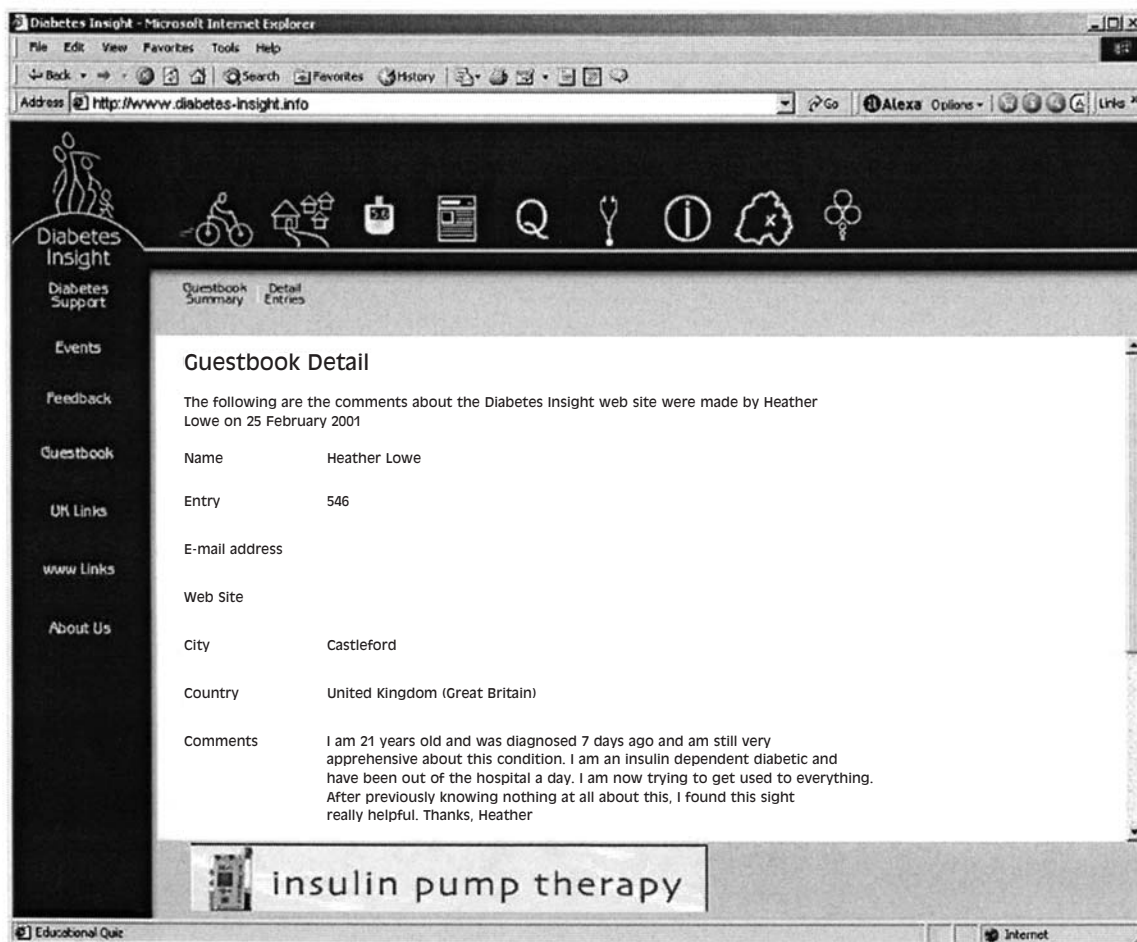


FIG. 2. A sample of the positive feedback left by a visitor in the Guestbook at the Diabetes Insight Website.

is usually subject to acceptance of the situation. Much of the success of Diabetes Insight is perhaps attributable to its pragmatic approach, which is summed up by the Website motto “Diabetes may be for life but it does not mean that it is a life sentence . . .” (Fig. 3).

Good glycaemic control offers the prospect of reduced micro- and macrovascular complications and an increased long-term quality of life for people with diabetes. Unfortunately many individuals with diabetes do not fully appreciate their own potential for improving the outcome. Here, the concept of tight control is clearly described at the Website with reference to the results of the Diabetes Control and Complications Trial.¹ The important elements of diabetes management and self-care are also introduced, and the central role of the person with diabetes in the overall scheme of diabetes care is highlighted.

One of the keys to good diabetes management undoubtedly lies with self-monitoring of blood glucose (SMBG). However, providing the individual with a finger-pricker, pack of strips, and a meter is not sufficient to ensure proper compliance. To reap the benefits of SMBG, people with diabetes and their carers must understand why and when they need to perform tests and what the results mean. These important issues are all addressed clearly at the Website.

Communication between the person with diabetes and his or her doctor is vital in establishing a successful working relationship, but unfortunately many individuals see barriers between themselves and health-care professionals. Diabetes Insight usefully supplies a list of “tips for talking to your doctor” that aim to help the individual get the most from a consultation. A series of questions addressing the

TABLE 1. ORGANISATION OF MATERIAL IN THE NEWLY DIAGNOSED ("NEWBIES") SECTION OF THE DIABETES INSIGHT WEBSITE (WWW.DIABETES-INSIGHT.INFO)

"Newbies"
Just diagnosed
What is diabetes
Glossary of terms
Talking to your doctor
Diabetes care
Blood glucose testing
Tight control
Hypoglycemia

nature of the diagnosis and the anticipated course of treatment should help the person with diabetes to focus on the important issues that he or she really wants to discuss. Of particular value here is the checklist, which has been compiled based on the Standards of Care recommended by the American Diabetes Association. This provides a useful indication of what should be expected from the clinic assessment and forms a good basis for the consultation.

The "information" section covers a wide range of topics (Table 2). The information is accurate and up-to-date, presented in simple language, and accompanied by practical advice with useful hints and tips. The "Insight into" guides comprise a series of portable document format (PDF) files covering all aspects of diabetes self-care. This PDF format, widely used on the Internet, enables documents to be transferred and shared across computer platforms, and viewed using a freeware reader. Visitors to the Website can download the files, then view or print them at their own leisure.

Making long-term lifestyle changes is frequently a barrier to success in diabetes therapy. The extensive "healthy living" section (Fig. 4) includes guidelines for healthy eating (Fig. 5), increasing physical activity, giving up smoking, and coping with stress. Each aspect is dealt with appropriately, with relevant practical advice and an emphasis on setting and achieving personal goals. Along with some of the better diabetes resources found on the Internet, Diabetes Insight takes a very down-to-earth approach, acknowledging the difficulties faced by

people with diabetes, and suggesting positive realistic ways to address the situation.

SUPPORT

The Diabetes Insight Website also hosts a support group—Diabetes Support—which

TABLE 2. ORGANISATION OF MATERIAL IN THE "INFORMATION" SECTION OF THE DIABETES INSIGHT WEBSITE (WWW.DIABETES-INSIGHT.INFO)

"Insight into" guides
Diagnosis
Tight control and blood glucose testing
Healthy eating for control
Your level of activity and exercise
Children and diabetes
Diabetes management
Complications
Children and diabetes
When a child comes to stay
Healthy living
What care to expect
Healthy eating
Exercise
Alcohol
Smoking
Care in hospital
Blood pressure
Stress
Basic care
Foot care
Ketoacidosis
Annual review
Blood glucose testing
Treatments
Diabetes management
Hints and tips
General information
Driving
Car insurance
Insurance
Travelling
Frequently asked questions
Books, leaflets, and videos
Insulin and oral medications
Insulins
Injection techniques
Oral medications
Complications
Depression
Nephropathy
Neuropathy
Retinopathy
Ketoacidosis
Studies
DCCT, UKPDS

DCCT, Diabetes Control and Complications Trial; UKPDS, UK Prospective Diabetes Study.

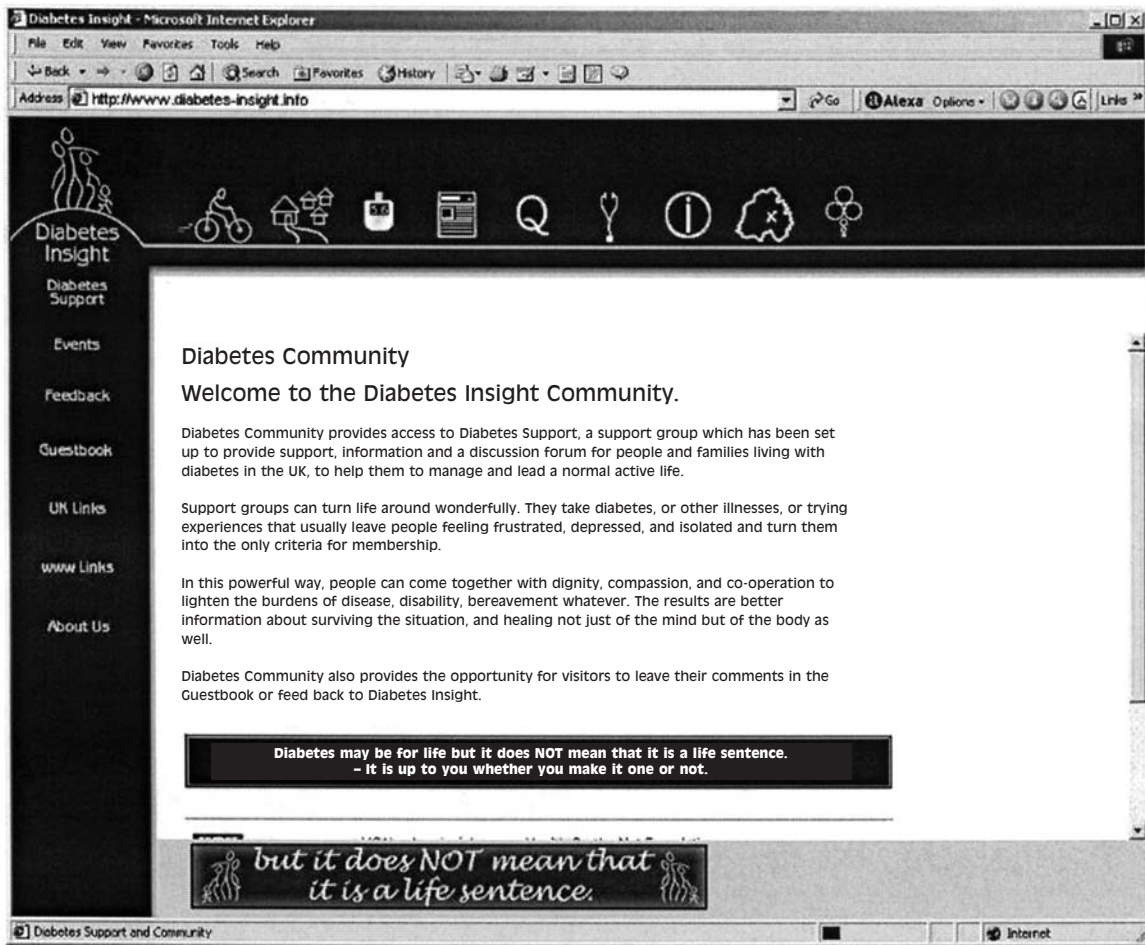


FIG. 3. The Diabetes Community section at the Diabetes Insight Website and the Diabetes Insight motto.

provides support, information, and a discussion forum for people living with diabetes. Emotional well-being and the role of support in diabetes care are well recognised. The psychological impact of diabetes on the individual and other family members can be significant, not just at diagnosis, but over the course of a lifetime. The knock-on effect of addressing fears and concerns related to living with diabetes is invariably improved self-care.

The popular Diabetes Support group takes the form of a "mailing list"; using electronic mail, people with diabetes and their relatives or carers can share experiences, exchange views, and discuss issues related to diabetes. The broad spectrum of topics addressed frequently includes difficulties in achieving control, dietary matters, relationships with physicians, devices for blood glucose management, depression,

complications and fears regarding complications, and occupational concerns including driving, insurance, and employment issues.

The benefits of an Internet-based support forum are numerous. There are no social, geographical, or time barriers. The support forum enables people to give and receive information and support on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis—whatever is appropriate to the individual. Members may choose to remain anonymous and/or effectively "silent," yet still follow the discussions, learn new information, and derive comfort from other people in similar situations. Participation in the group intuitively should be able to relieve feelings of isolation and help improve self-esteem, although little formal research in this important area seems to have yet been done.

A Web-based discussion forum has now

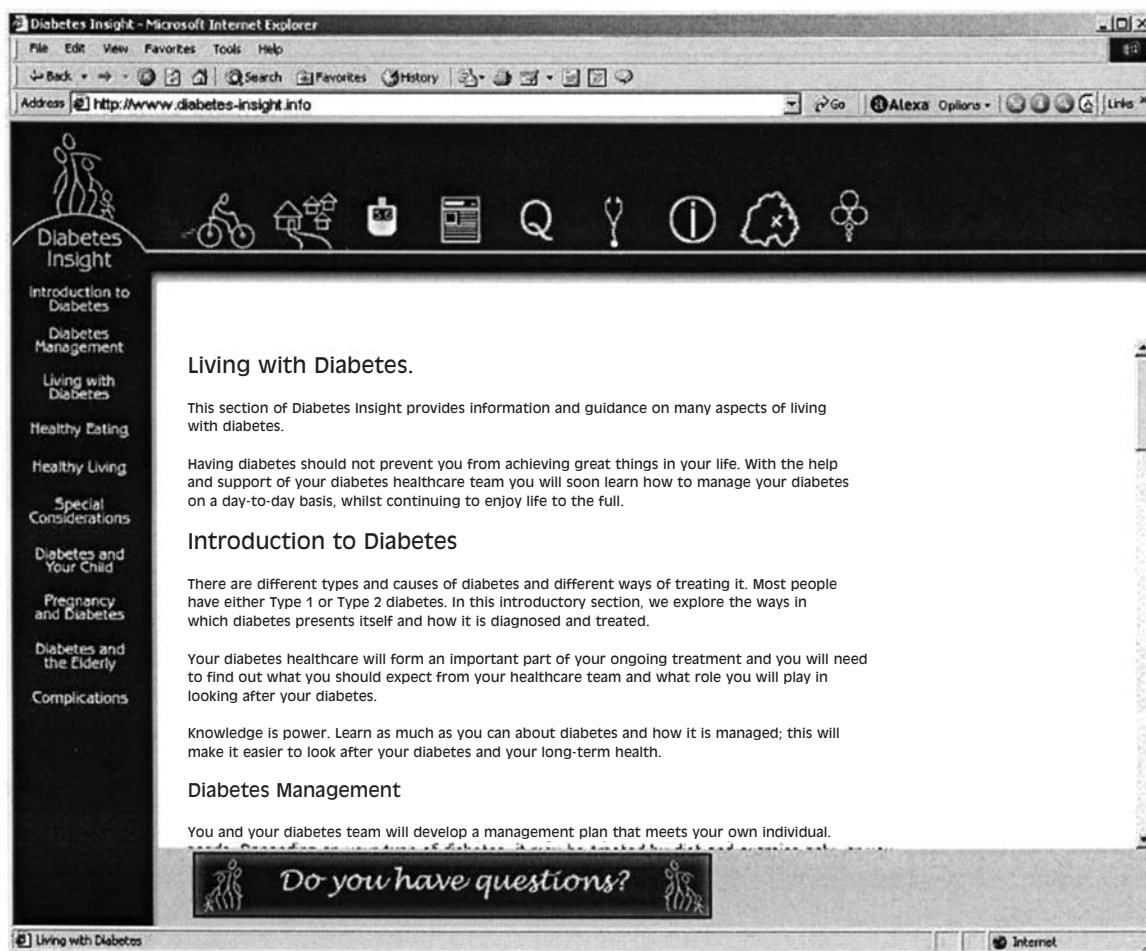


FIG. 4. The “Living with Diabetes” section at the Diabetes Insight Website.

been added, in addition to the e-mail support group. The Web-based forum can be found at www.support.diabetes-insight.info. A Video Library has also been included at the Website. This is a series of video Web-cast interviews, transcripts, and articles that covers various aspects of living with diabetes.

DISCUSSION

The importance of educating people with diabetes has become increasingly evident in recent years, yet the time and resources available to the health-care team to do this are still limited. For many people the Internet is fast becoming a first port of call for general information—and this is as true for health-care information in diabetes as it is for other types

of information. The Diabetes Insight Website makes a useful contribution by providing patients and their relatives with information that can be freely accessed in a timely fashion.

Obviously the Diabetes Insight Website is not alone—there are literally thousands of resources related to diabetes care on the Web.² However, in Internet terms the Diabetes Insight Website has been around a long time. In this respect it has stood the test of time. It is comprehensive—but not so massive that visitors get totally lost. Furthermore, it is easy to navigate—yet its slightly more manageable size also makes it more personal. In addition, the limited use of advertising ensures that the site does not have a “commercial feel.” In this respect Diabetes Insight is an independent Website, independent from pharmaceutical and diagnostic companies and from patient organi-

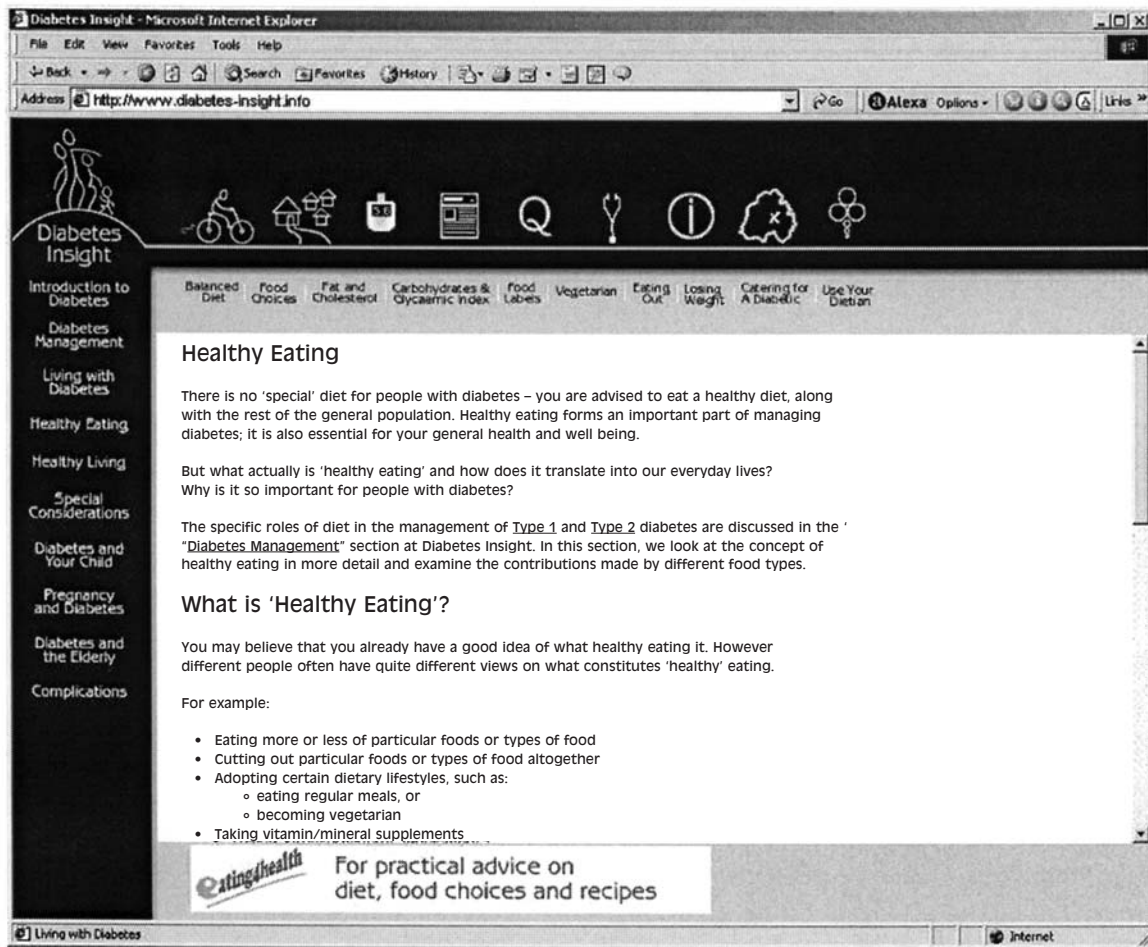


FIG. 5. The “Healthy Eating” section at the Diabetes Insight Website.

zations. In today’s era of vested interests and political issues, etc., it is very refreshing to find such a completely independent resource.

Finally, it is probably worth mentioning that while there is a lot of information “out there” on the Web, not all of it is necessarily true or accurate.³ Unfortunately there are many people out to make a “quick buck” selling dodgy products, etc. on the Web—so one of the down sides of providing information through the Internet is that the individual who is searching for information has to be selective and discerning, and this is especially important in the context of medical information. Given this, finding reliable sources of information on the Web is of considerable importance.

Over 8 years of using the Diabetes Insight Website, we have both found it to offer reliable, accurate and informative content in an easy-to-access form. It illustrates much of what is best

about the Web—in particular the way that one individual can really make a difference and help others—in a manner that was simply impossible a few short years ago. Our current “report card” for the Diabetes Insight Website reads “10/10—well worth a visit.” We look forward to seeing it develop and grow.

FURTHER TOPICS

If you would like to suggest further topics or Websites for future Diabetes Information Technology & WebWatch columns, please e-mail information—with a brief description of the site/suggestion—to Dr. E.D. Lehmann: info-www@2aida.org (please write Diabetes Web-Watch in the subject line). You can also fax information to: (503) 218-0828, quoting Diabetes Information Technology & WebWatch.

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