

#NowIKnow

The **value of living** through my **employer-sponsored wellness screening**

“ If I had the ability to go back and pick up my results booklet, and act on those numbers before any of this happened, I would. ”



When a company makes the decision to offer wellness screenings to its employees, it is offering an opportunity for them to know their numbers and decipher what is going on inside their bodies. Unfortunately, not everyone participates in screenings. And even those who do don't always act on the valuable insights they receive. Change is difficult, and it is easy to place the results booklet on a shelf and just go about life, or to follow up with a doctor but not make the lifestyle changes needed to

live a healthier life. Ignoring what your body is saying not only increases the chances of developing chronic disease, it can also put you in grave danger for any of a number of catastrophic events.

One Quest Diagnostics employee Justin experienced firsthand the importance of screening and following up on his results because over time, ignoring his results led to drastic consequences. He's now working to spread the word to coworkers, friends, and family about the importance of taking the time to complete a screening, review the results carefully, see a doctor for proper follow-up, and make the changes necessary to live life to its fullest.



Justin Clarke

“In the fall of 2015, I completed my first Blueprint for Wellness® screening (the Quest Diagnostics employee wellness screening program) and, as I suspected, many of my numbers were out of range,” Justin said. “For the longest time I ignored all kinds of symptoms. I smoked, didn't eat well, and drank 2 or 3 sugar-filled energy drinks every day. I was feeling crummy, but I always chalked up any symptoms to working too much or not sleeping enough. I even joked about my numbers with my coworkers, but after sharing my numbers, many thought I should at least follow up with a doctor to see what was going on. So I looked into that first set of numbers to see what the root issue was.”

A few weeks after he received his screening results, Justin followed up with a primary care physician. The physician informed Justin that based on his numbers, he had type 2 diabetes. His doctor recommended seeing a specialist, so Justin called that office to schedule an appointment, but they never returned his call.

“After not receiving a call back from the specialist, I didn’t follow up on any of it,” he said. “I wasn’t motivated to follow up and just went about my life. And I didn’t tell anyone about the diagnosis because I thought people would be watching what I was eating or making assumptions.”

For about a year, Justin continued to ignore the symptoms he was experiencing, and he even skipped his 2016 screening.

“I was busy,” Justin said. “Our busiest time of year at work is right when screenings are taking place and I couldn’t find the time at work to get to an onsite event. I didn’t really think it was worth making an effort at that point, and Patient Service Centers near me were closed outside of work hours, but now I wish I would have made the time to get it done.”



In November 2016, Justin got a cut on his foot and, although it seemed to be taking a while to heal, he shrugged it off. Eventually he sent a photo of the cut to a friend, who showed it to a doctor.

“My friend texted me back and said that I needed to get to a hospital right away,” he said. “I went to the hospital, and even though they put me on medication for the infection, the cut still wasn’t healing right. Blisters started to develop on my foot, and I would sweat and then get chills. I felt like garbage. I had to go back to the hospital in February because it wasn’t getting any better.”

At the hospital on February 4, 2017, physicians amputated his big toe and the bone below it, as well as surrounding muscle to remove the infection.

After surgery, Justin spent 2 weeks in a nursing facility with physical rehabilitation so he could adjust to walking without a portion of his foot. For the next month, he had home healthcare assistance, where a nurse would help clean his PICC line (a thin intravenous line for fluid intake that goes directly to the heart) and redress his wound. He also wore a wound vac (a machine that administers pressure therapy to help wounds heal) and attended 3 doctor visits per week to see a wound specialist, an infection specialist, and a podiatrist. Justin was also prescribed 2.5-hour hyperbaric sessions five times a week, in addition to all of his other doctor visits.



“It was surreal, waking up and seeing that a part of my body was gone; they went 10.5cm deep into my foot, removing muscle and bone,” Justin said. “A small cut on my foot didn’t heal right because of my unmanaged type 2 diabetes, and now part of my foot was completely gone. That was the turning point. I now knew something needed to be done and that I needed to change my diet and learn to control my diabetes.”

During the few weeks following the home healthcare visits, Justin began making lifestyle changes. “First, I quit smoking, which was huge. Then I started eating healthier and learned how to read nutrition labels to know when foods were bad news,” he said.

Even with treatments and the lifestyle changes he was now making, he still was not feeling well. Justin went to the hospital again in May 2017, and when he had his numbers tested, his blood glucose level was extremely high. The difficult news was that his wound from surgery was now infected because at some point during his treatment, he had broken his middle toe, which subsequently did not heal correctly, and infected the entirety of the front of his foot. Unfortunately, this meant Justin would need to undergo a second amputation, and with this, a repeat of the rehabilitation he had done after the first surgery, as well as home healthcare visits. During the time following his surgery, Justin took his dietary changes more seriously.

“This time they took the front half of my foot,” Justin said. “And the surgeon had said that if it didn’t heal properly, the next step was to amputate just below my knee. I started eating a high-protein diet. I also cut down on carbs, and now I don’t eat any sugar-based carbs whatsoever. When I started talking to dieticians they talked about portion control, but I find it easier to cut out sugar entirely. It’s tough. Your doctor won’t know if you have cheat days, but your pancreas will – and there’s proof that I can’t hide from that one.”

Luckily, the second amputation took, and Justin’s foot is healing well. He now has a prosthetic so he can walk normally without a heel walker. He continues to see the benefits of his healthy lifestyle in the way he feels and in the way it has affected his coworkers.

“I feel healthier. I’m not tired all the time, and I am way more motivated to get out and move around,” he said. “I’ve found that people are very supportive of my new habits and understand my need to stay healthy and do the right things. Right after this stuff happened, others started walking on breaks and taking wellness more seriously, too. I think being close to me may have helped influence them to make healthy changes too.”

Justin hopes that his story inspires others to pay close attention to their health.

“I’m in a situation now where I will never heal right because of the diabetes. If I ignore an injury or a cut or something that might seem minor to many people, it’s not a few days with a Band-Aid, it’s a trip to the hospital and surgery. It’s awful, but I’m talking now because I don’t want anyone to have to go through that.

“Pay attention to what your body is telling you!” Justin also emphasized, to make sure your priorities are in order. “Don’t prioritize work or a busy schedule, or anything else for that matter, ahead of your health. It’s not worth it. And don’t ignore when you don’t feel well or something’s not right; that’s your body telling you to take notice and take action. If I had the ability to go back and make changes after my 2015 screening, I would. And if I could go back and complete my screening in 2016, I would. I can’t change it now, but I hope no one ever has to deal with something like this.”

For more information about your employer-sponsored wellness screening program and how to register for your biometric screening, contact the Quest Diagnostics Health & Wellness Service Center at 1.855.623.9355.

All individual results from employer-sponsored screenings are private and considered Protected Health Information under HIPAA. Your employer does not have access to your individual results. Justin volunteered to share his story to help spread the word about the importance of Blueprint for Wellness.