

# Yvette Nicole Brown:

## Laughter Is the Best Medicine

By Leslie Pepper

**GOOD-BYE DONUTS!**  
Brown swapped sweets for healthier fare once she got a diabetes diagnosis.

**O**n the CBS comedy *The Odd Couple*, Yvette Nicole Brown brings on the laughs with her character, Dani, Oscar Madison's assistant. But in 2013, a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes threatened to dim her smile.

The news did not come completely out of the blue. Brown had been diagnosed with prediabetes about 10 years earlier. That means her blood glucose levels were above normal, but not high enough for a diagnosis of full-blown diabetes. Brown's doctor had urged her to take better care of herself. Being diagnosed with prediabetes put Brown at higher risk not only for developing diabetes within 10 years, but also for developing cardiovascular disease and having a stroke.

But Brown, 45, didn't heed the warning. Long hours on set meant eating whatever food was served. And her exercise routine was almost nonexistent. "For some reason, the 'pre' seemed like I wasn't there yet. I just kept eating donuts and not drinking water and not exercising," she says. "My doctor had been waving the flag for a long time. She finally said, 'Here you go, kid, this is where we are now.'"

Brown began taking metformin—an oral diabetes medication that controls blood sugar levels—immediately because her blood sugar was very high (between 230 and 270 mg/dL). That triggered Brown to finally spring into action. She began to research the disease and realized she needed to take it much more

seriously. After a good cry, she decided to find a way to laugh herself through it. “With everything in life, you have a choice to go down the dark road or go down the light road, and I chose to go down the light road,” she says.

While lemonade, sweet tea, and soda had been her staples, water became her new drink of choice. “And I stopped cold turkey with the donuts. I’m telling you, it was so hard for me to let that maple glaze go,” she says. Lean meats, broccoli, and cauliflower became her “really good friends,” and she made sure to put smaller portions of carbs on her plate.

Brown admits she doesn’t like exercise, but living in sunny Los Angeles makes it pretty easy to get outside and walk. She also put a treadmill in her garage and bribes herself daily to use it. “I like to binge-watch television shows, so I’ll tell myself, ‘You can watch the next episode of *Atlanta*, but you have to watch it on the treadmill.’”

Luckily, Brown’s changes paid off. After about two years, she got down to a healthy weight and her blood sugar became manageable without medication. What mattered to Brown were her blood glucose numbers. “People ask me how much I lost. I know that I’ve gone down in sizes. But it never was about being skinny. It was always about checking my numbers. As long as my numbers kept getting better than I stayed on the treadmill a little longer, so it just became a goal towards health.” Her target, she says, is for her fasting blood sugar to be around 88 mg/dL in the morning. It’s been consistently between 82 and 91 mg/dL since she’s lost weight.

“I wasn’t the poster girl for health and fitness. I never have been. I never will be, but I would love to be a poster girl for that 88 mg/dL fasting blood sugar in the morning.”

But Brown is indeed a poster child for good oral health. She’s partnering with the American Diabetes Association and Colgate to help raise awareness of the link between oral health and diabetes. The destruction diabetes can cause to the heart, eye, nerves, and kidneys is well-known, but the mouth can be affected, too. People with diabetes are at greater risk for gingivitis (early-stage gum disease) as well as periodontitis (serious gum disease)—and vice versa. Gum disease may make it more difficult to control your blood sugar and may contribute to the progression of diabetes.

Brown had no idea about the connection until recently. As a result, her dental hygiene habits have done a 180. “My dentist has become one of my best friends,” she says. “I get checkups every three months, I brush twice a day, and floss at least once a day.”

At the moment, she’s got plenty of reasons to smile. In addition to being on *The Odd Couple*, she’s the voice of Luna, a magical flying creature on Disney’s series *Elena of Avalor*. She’s also appearing in a three-night miniseries entitled *The New Edition Story* on BET.

Even when her struggle with diabetes gets challenging, Brown tries to remain positive. When her pants start to feel a little snug, she pushes herself to stay on the treadmill through a few more episodes of *Atlanta*. “It’s a daily choice to live a good, healthy life,” she says.