

Summer Wake Up Call

By: Joseph Casas

Growing up in the Rio Grande Valley, summer holds a lot of memories and fun times. It meant carne asadas with family, trips to South Padre Island, raspas on a hot day, and hanging out with my friends. But last summer taught me something I hadn't expected; that even in a place where we celebrate life so fully and enjoy the summer months to the fullest, we can't afford to ignore our health, especially when the heat sets in.



I've lived here all my life. Like most people in our community, I'm used to the sun. We know it gets hot, and we just go on with our lives, not really thinking twice about it. But one July afternoon, things changed for me. I was helping my uncle set up for a carne asada, and after just an hour outside, I felt weak. My heart was racing, I couldn't cool down, and I had to sit under a tree with a wet towel just to feel okay.

Everyone said it was just the heat. Maybe I didn't drink enough water. Maybe I was just tired. But I didn't feel like myself for days. I was constantly thirsty, had headaches, and felt like I couldn't catch my breath. My mom insisted I go to the clinic. I almost didn't go. I didn't want to be dramatic. But looking back, that visit probably saved my life.

At the clinic, they ran a few tests. My blood pressure was too high. My blood sugar was climbing. The nurse looked at me and asked if anyone in my family had diabetes. I nodded. Both my parents. Two uncles. My abuelita. That's when it hit me this wasn't just about the heat. We don't always talk about health in Latino families until something serious happens. We tough things out. We put others first. But the truth is, in places like the Valley where the summer heat is intense and chronic illnesses like diabetes and high blood pressure are common staying silent about our health can be dangerous.



In the Rio Grande Valley, we face more than just hot weather; we face health disparities. Many of our neighbors don't have easy access to regular care. Some don't have insurance. Others, like me, assume they're "fine" until something happens.

But summer is the perfect time to pay attention. The heat can make health problems worse; dehydration can affect your kidneys, high temperatures can raise your blood pressure, and if you have diabetes, the sun can impact your blood sugar levels in ways you might not expect.

That's why screenings matter. A quick visit to a clinic can reveal high blood sugar, cholesterol issues, or early signs of something more serious. For me, it meant catching a problem before it became life-changing.

After that scare, I started making small changes: drinking more water, cutting back on soda, and walking in the mornings before the sun gets too strong. I also convinced my dad to get a screening too. He hadn't seen a doctor in years. Turned out his blood pressure was high as well.

Taking care of our health doesn't mean we stop enjoying life. It means making sure we're here to enjoy it longer with our kids, our abuelos, our friends, and our comadres.

Getting screened might feel intimidating, but it's an act of love, for yourself and for your family. And in the Valley, where we value family above all else, that's something we can all understand.

Unidos Contra La Diabetes would like to highlight your story. If you or anyone you know would like to participate in our shared lived experiences blog, please reach out to info@ucdrgv.org

August 2025 Blog

