

BIG UP TO HOWZA

.. for raising awareness of diabetes

Actor and musician Howza is in mint condition, yet he has a killer disease he has to treat three times a day. He spoke to HELEN GRANGE about living with diabetes.

TSHEPO Mosese, better known as Howza, gently lifts the arm of his T-shirt to show the tan line on a very muscular bicep. "Shoo, it's hot. I got this sun-tan today already," he smiles.

The 26-year-old is the picture of health, and he exudes an easy confidence and affability that quickly strips away all interview formalities.

For the uninitiated, Howza rose to fame for his roles as Chase in *Backstage* and as Adam in *Generations*, while music lovers will know him as a member of the kwaito band Blackjack and for his famous track, *Styla samahala*. Currently he hosts a youth Christian lifestyle magazine show, *Big Up*, on SABC1. He married *Top Billing* presenter Salamina Mosese last year and the couple live in Randburg.

It is hard to believe that this young man lives with a potentially lethal disease, diabetes, which he has to manage carefully with three insulin injections a day as well as a strict diet and exercise regime.

Howza is married to *Top Billing* presenter Salamina Mosese.



Howza has Type 1 diabetes, most commonly found in kids and young adults. The pancreas stops producing insulin, and the onset of symptoms can be sudden and dramatic.

"My symptoms started about five years ago," says Howza. "I began losing a lot of weight and my eyesight became blurry. I always felt very dehydrated. I started wondering what was wrong with me."

He went to a doctor, who diagnosed him with Type 1 diabetes, and Howza had to grapple with the fact that he had a lifelong illness that required constant treatment and a far healthier lifestyle.

"I was really living it up at the time, eating junk food and drinking excessively," he says. "Musicians are booked mostly over the weekends, so there was a lot of free time during the week to party it up."

On being diagnosed, Howza went to a dietitian, who told him his lifestyle would have to change dramatically. Although he could drink, he'd have to stop at one beer, and fast food was out.

"I'm an all-or-nothing kind of guy, so I decided to stop drinking altogether. I've been alcohol-free for five years. I'm glad I did it, because I think I was getting into trouble with it," he beams.

The shift took some getting used to, he admits. "Alcohol would help my confidence, help me perform. But that's all in the mind. I overpowered it. These days I'm comfortable with myself. I'm in a good space mentally. I say, love me the way I am."

Howza was South Africa's diabetes ambassador this month, National Diabetes Month, and travelled around the country to spread awareness of the disease known as the "silent killer".

He participated in the spectacular lighting up of Table Mountain in Cape Town in blue on the eve of the UN's World Diabetes Day, afterwards travelling to



Durban. On December 1, he will be attending a diabetes conference in Athens, Greece, where he will tell his story once more.

As someone so proactive about managing the disease, he is ideal for the job. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his insulin syringe, which he uses three times a day before meals.

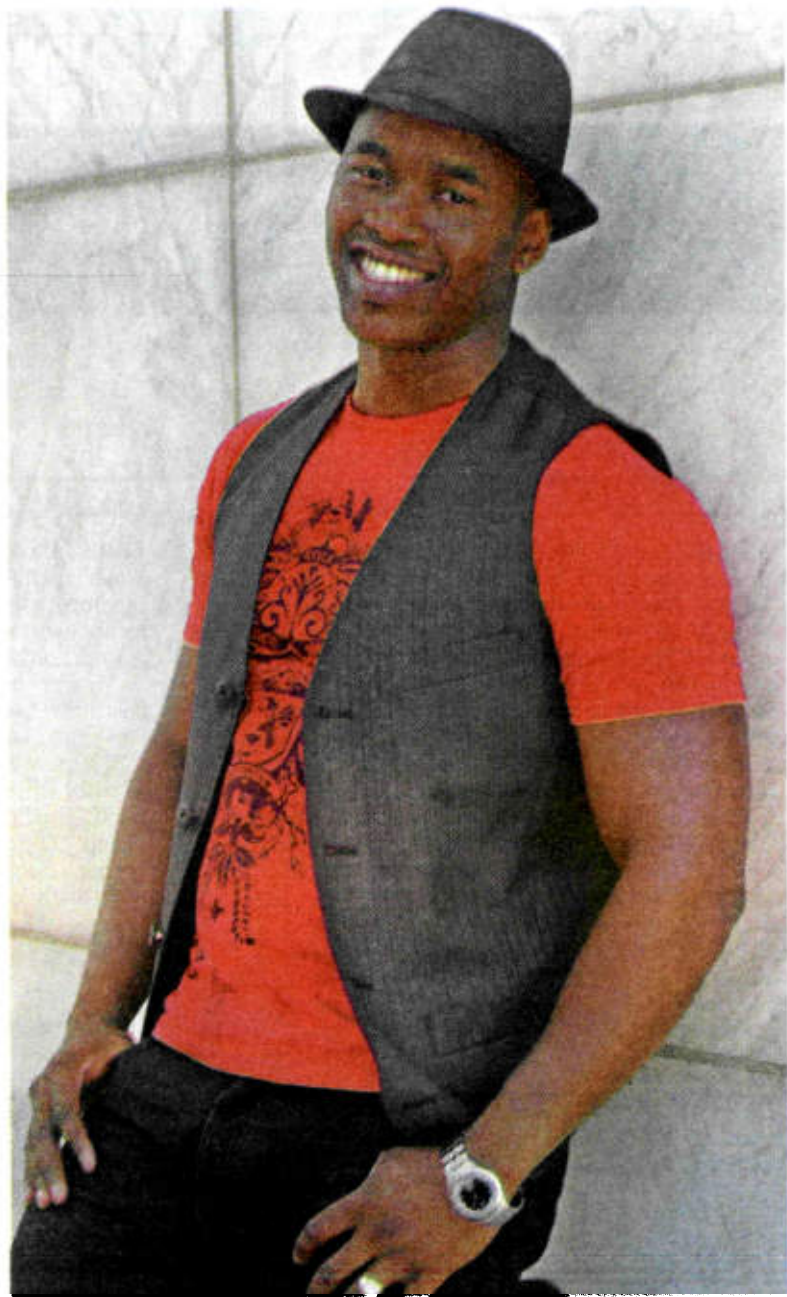
"I inject myself in circles, in the shoulder, belly and then the buttocks. I prefer to inject in the belly because it's closer to the pancreas.

"I used to be terrified of needles, but you get used to it," he says, taking the cap off his injector and showing me the small, thin needle.

Howza is strict about the injections, because if he misses one his blood sugar level might spike and lead to serious complications such as strokes and organ failure.

Basically, diabetes is a defect in the way your pancreas produces insulin, a hormone which helps the glucose (sugar) from food get into your cells to give you energy. If your body doesn't make enough insulin, glucose can't get into your cells, so it stays in your blood and your blood glucose level gets too high.

"My sugar levels have to be between 4 and 7 on the glucometer (a small digital machine that tests your blood with one prick to a finger), but I can also feel when my blood sugar is high because my



Howza, who is presenting *Big Up*, a Christian lifestyle magazine show on SABC1 in which local musicians play tribute to local heroes, has done his own community service during Diabetes Month.

PICTURES: BOXER NGWENYA

mouth gets dry," Howza says, adding: "That's the other reason it's best not to drink, because you might confuse feeling drunk with feeling hypoglycaemic, which makes you feel faint and confused."

Howza's father also has diabetes, but his is Type 2, which is the most common form and often occurs in people who are overweight.

"My dad has had diabetes for as long as I can remember, but when the initial symptoms started hitting me, I didn't imagine that it might be diabetes, because I thought it only happened to older or obese people. So by the time I was admitted to hospital, I was in a very serious condition," he recalls.

His father, who manages his

diabetes with pills, developed diabetes because of his lifestyle, particularly a starch-rich diet.

"My own diet today is really healthy. I eat a lot of veggies like lettuce, cabbage and beetroot. I hate pumpkin, but I have to eat that too. I'm lucky, though, because my wife knows how to prepare food for me. I also drink lots of water."

He tries to go to the gym at least three times a week.

Howza's road manager and a friend come over to join him, and they banter like young men before ordering lunch.

It's hard to imagine that Howza, fit and cheerful, might have died from his condition had he not caught it when he did.

