

A “From Me and My Friends to You and Yours” Resource, on Type One Diabetes

Hey! I’m Jenny! I’m going to tell you a bit about Type One Diabetes! (That’s me!)



(Image description: Jenny is in front of a mirror taking a photo of her smiling face in the mirror. You can also see her blood glucose monitor on her arm which looks like a little white disc attached to her upper arm.)

What is Type One Diabetes?

Type one diabetes is an auto-immune condition which affects the way your body processes carbohydrates and sugar. Auto-immune means that it has nothing to do with diet, exercise or the person’s upbringing, it is just up to chance. 400,000 people are living in the UK with type one diabetes!

People without diabetes use their pancreas to make a hormone called insulin to process those carbs into energy, whereas a diabetic pancreas can’t make that hormone. This means every time a diabetic person eats carbohydrates or sugar, they need to inject a certain amount of that insulin depending on the food. For instance, a bowl of cereal has lots of carbs in it so a diabetic person would need to inject insulin to eat that meal. If

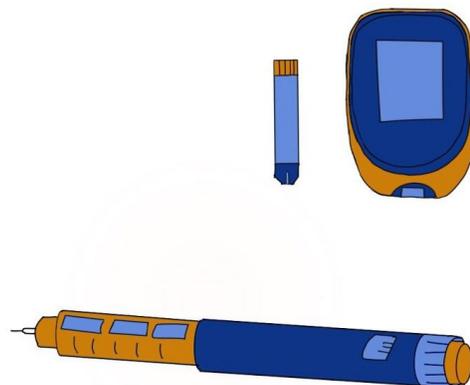
they don't inject, their blood sugar will go very high and that can result in lots of nasty complications over time. A diabetic also experiences low blood sugar when they need to eat carbs in order to cure it because, again, there are lots of nasty complications. Having high and low blood sugar happens all the time! It can be very difficult to control even if a person is being very careful.

Is that the one my Gran has?

Maybe! But you might be thinking of Type 2 Diabetes which can be brought on by lifestyle choices, age and genetics. They are very different illnesses which get treated differently but for some reason they both have the same name. Confusing, I know! I'll just be talking about type one for today.

How do I tell if someone is a diabetic?

Sometimes it's really hard to tell - many people you have met are diabetic and you may have never realised! Some people do not have any physical signs of diabetes but will carry their supplies with them so you would only notice if you eat a meal with them or see them testing their blood or injecting with devices that might look a bit like this:



(Image description: There is a drawing of a blue and orange injection pen, a blood glucose meter and a blood test strip which goes inside the blood glucose meter)

Although I, for instance, have a blood glucose monitor on my arm that looks like a little disc (the one I've got on in that photo above!). These come in a bunch of different shapes too. Some people also have insulin pumps attached to their bodies as they find it easier than injecting. Don't be afraid to ask questions as long as you're polite, it means that we can all look after each other better!

How do you get type one diabetes? And can I catch it?

No. It is not contagious, nor is it brought on by a poor diet or lack of exercise. The most common age to be diagnosed is in your early teens, but it can develop at any time.

How does type one diabetes impact my...

→ Body?

- ◆ I need to do a blood test and inject over four times a day so I sometimes experience pain from those
- ◆ If I am high on sugar I feel fatigued, sick, constantly thirsty and needing to use the toilet. High sugar also results in broken blood vessels that can impact your vision and circulation, and also more extreme side effects
- ◆ If I am low on sugar my brain doesn't have enough energy to function properly so my vision blurs, I sweat, and I have little comprehension of my surroundings

→ Mind?

- ◆ Diabetes takes up a lot of my mind as I need to balance exercise, food, insulin, sleep etc very carefully. This results in me being overly cautious with my actions and feeling the need to plan much of my life.
- ◆ Being diabetic can also feel really lonely at times if you are not aware of other people with the condition or are in a situation where nobody understands that you need to plan meals and have access to food. For instance, I was in an art gallery eating a cereal bar once, and I got told off even after explaining to the person on duty that I was a diabetic.
- ◆ When I was younger I felt embarrassed of my diabetes and having to inject, especially around people I didn't know. Also, going low on sugar in front of strangers can be particularly embarrassing when you forget where you are, or even collapse. Even though those situations are nothing to be embarrassed about, I still to this day worry about 'causing a scene'!

→ Life?

- ◆ I plan... a lot! Diabetes, while it can be unpredictable, is much easier to manage when things are planned out. While this stops me from being super spontaneous, I can still go wherever and eat whatever - it doesn't hold me back from anything!
- ◆ Finding people you can trust with your health can be difficult, but I am self-sufficient enough that friends and family would only need to intervene in absolute emergencies. So I give all my friends a heads up of what to do in emergencies and let flatmates know to check up on me if they haven't seen me in a while.

What can I do to help?

→ Give us time and be patient

- ◆ Diabetics will need 5-10 minutes here and there to get their blood sugar going in the right direction. That means just giving us the time to do this with patience, even if everyone is in a rush. Let us feel calm!
- Carry a snack
 - ◆ If you're heading out with a diabetic it's always good to have a snack on hand in case of a low blood sugar, usually a cereal bar or something with carbs. If someone does this for me it always feels so kind and supportive and I know that the person has my back (even though 90% of the time I will have my own)
- Understand that you might not know best!
 - ◆ Passing judgement on a diabetic's food choices can be extremely detrimental to a diabetic's mental health as we already are having to deal with complicated relationships to food! Phrases like 'should you really be eating that?' aren't great because a) diabetics can eat whatever they want as long as they take an appropriate amount of insulin and b) it can be very patronising. If you have questions about what we eat, just ask nicely!

My diabetic friend is acting weird / making strange noises / unconscious. What do I do?

Call 999. This could mean that the diabetic is having a Hypoglycemic episode. Even if you are unsure if it is serious or not, the operator will guide you in what to do next. It's always good to have carb snacks on hand, such as a cereal bar, sweets or a carton of full sugar juice, and if the diabetic is able to eat it is best to offer them some. If the person is violent or will not take the food, then the best thing to do is get an ambulance! **Never, never ever never, inject a diabetic on their behalf without being specifically instructed. You could make matters a whole lot worse!**

This information is coming from me, a diabetic person, but by no means an expert!
There is still loads that I don't know about diabetes and there are great resources available if you are keen to look a bit further into it:

→ **JDRF** <https://jdrf.org.uk/>

- ◆ This charity specifically deals with type one diabetes and has loads of information about the medical aspect of diabetes and put loads of it into plain english.

→ **My Diabetes My Way**

<https://www.mydiabetesmyway.scot.nhs.uk/#gsc.tab=0>

- ◆ This is run by NHS Scotland and has lots of advice and information

→ **There are a bunch of diabetic instagram accounts that show you a more personal experience of diabetes**

- ◆ @diabeautiful and @pricksofficial are some I follow

→ **Youtube**

- ◆ For diabetes tech: Nerdabetic

<https://www.youtube.com/c/Nerdabetic/videos>

- ◆ For day-in-the-life: Bella Bucchiotti

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8CokycLLDw>

Thanks for reading!

About the Author...

Jenny (she her) has just graduated from Glasgow uni with a degree in theatre studies and is moving to Birmingham for all things acting!

Get Involved!

We would love to get as many people involved in creating these resources as possible! If you are a young person living with a chronic illness, disability, or long term health condition, and would be interested in making a similar resource based on YOUR experiences, we would love to hear from you! You can email us at thelunaprojectuk@gmail.com ! You can also find us on social media [@thelunaprojectuk](#)