

I HAVE DIABETES

By Adele Postins (Year 10)

You may know me or may never have taught me, but it's important that everyone at [School] knows and understands that I have Type 1 Diabetes and what it means. I've had this condition for $5\frac{1}{2}$ years and in previous years a DSN (Diabetes Specialist Nurse) has been into school and given a presentation. I went to it for the first time last year and was shocked to see less than 10 teachers there. I never realised how small an audience she was explaining my condition to and to be honest, it wasn't exactly an inspiring presentation. I don't think that much was taken in and remembered right the way through to the end of the school year. That's why this year I've decided to email this document to all of the teachers at [School]. So, when you have time, please read this and take it in - any little detail remembered can only be a good thing! I know you're all very busy, but please take a few minutes to read this.

Thank you for your time,
Adele.



INTRODUCTION

I just want to clear up that Type 1 Diabetes isn't the same as Type 2 Diabetes (which is linked to obesity). Many people think diabetes is just diabetes and people get it because they're fat, but they are wrong. I have Type 1, which can only be managed by taking several insulin injections every day or by going on an insulin pump. People with Type 2 usually manage it with diet and tablets, but sometimes injections too. I didn't get diabetes because I ate too many sweets or because I was too fat; it wasn't my fault. When people who don't have any idea about Type 1 say things like this, you don't realise the effect it has. My mum has been distraught several times by people making cutting comments that just aren't true.

I have Type 1 Diabetes and I have to live with it for the rest of my life or until a cure is found. Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) is the main charity searching for a cure to Type 1. They are making it easier to manage Type 1, but so far no cure has been found. I manage my Diabetes by taking 5 to 10 blood tests from my fingers every day and by having 5 insulin injections in my legs every day. This is up to 100 needles going into my body in a week! This is just to stay alive (and people who say "I could never do that" - they could, if it was a matter of life or death). I was, and still am, needle phobic, but I want to stay alive and so if I need around 400,000 needles being stuck into my body in my lifetime, I'll just have to have them.

I think in the past, I've ignored my diabetes a bit too much - I want a 'normal' life, but getting the balance between looking after my diabetes well, but not obsessively, and still continuing a normal life is hard. My blood sugars have been much too high (the HbA1c test results should be between 4 and 7, but mine has been around 10 for the past 4 years). Recently though, I've been taking a more active role in caring for myself, as the implications of badly controlled diabetes are starting to sound a bit more scary (Atherosclerosis,



Diabetic kidney disease, Diabetic neuropathy and Diabetic retinopathy). These are serious complications that could actually affect me, so now, my family and I are working harder to help me and I hope writing this document for you will be a good step forwards.

This document isn't a sympathy vote or a science lesson; I want to, and actually need to, inform you about my condition and explain how I may need your help. If I was to write about every aspect of having diabetes and all the science behind it, I would be here for days writing it and you'd be here for hours reading it! Even though this document may look quite long, I've made it as short and as to the point as possible, so it's actually only a small insight into the world of Type 1 Diabetes.



GENERAL POINTS ABOUT MY DIABETES

I test my blood sugars and inject insulin by myself. If you would like to know more, just ask!

One possible problem is rushed break and lunch times; I may be a bit late for lessons. If I am or if I cause my friends to be, then I apologize, but sometimes I need extra time and it can't be avoided.

I don't like to make a fuss about my condition, but just because of this, it doesn't make it any less serious. I do have a life-threatening disease (yes, it is a disease, but I feel 'condition' fits better) that affects every aspect of my life. I'm not shy about having Type 1 and will happily tell anyone that asks about it. I don't make a huge deal out of having Type 1 though, so I think a lot of people don't realise how much it affects my life. In fact, I think lots of people think that it's good to have diabetes as I get to eat in lessons and go to lunch early - how wrong can they be?! I don't think they've thought about the injections, the emotional side and having to eat at 3am, when you feel physically sick!

Exercise generally lowers blood sugars, but it can have the opposite effect. This means that I should have time to test my blood sugars before and after exercise and during if I need to. If I'm going to do some serious, heavy exercise, I do need a warning as I have to take into account the effects it could have, for example; long distance running and swimming need careful planning.

In the case of a fire, I will need to take my bag with me. I keep it on me at all times in case of an emergency, so if anything happened and I needed my bag and couldn't get to it then I could be in serious trouble!

I think the main thing that will affect teachers in school is when I have a 'hypo'.

DEALING WITH A 'HYPO'

This is probably the most important point that needs to be made at school; hypoglycaemia. This is when my blood sugars drop too low, so I need to eat some sugary food. If I say I need to eat, it can't wait a few minutes until the end of the lesson or whilst you just finish marking something; I need to eat now! This may mean leaving the lesson and going to the nurse with someone, never alone; sitting at the back of the classroom and eating; leaving during an exam or skipping the lunch queue. If I don't eat soon enough, then my blood sugars will keep on dropping and I may faint and go into a diabetic coma. This has luckily never happened to me as I'm quite good at recognising the symptoms.

I have 'hypo boxes' around the school - one in my locker, one in the main reception in AO and a 'master box' in the nurses' room. They all contain a sugary drink, some sweets, biscuits and GlucoGel. This is to be used if I faint; it should be squirted around the inside of my mouth. I do carry some emergency food in case of a hypo, but I usually need something from my hypo box too.

When I'm hypo, I'm often not the nicest person to be around; my mood changes quite rapidly (ask my mum - I've insulted her many times!). I do try to stay polite, but my main aim is to eat, so if I'm a bit rude to you please don't be offended; I didn't mean it!

Special considerations should be put in place for me during exams. My doctor has sent a letter into school addressing this. I often take 30 minutes to an hour to feel better again, which needs to be accommodated for.



FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions, queries or would like to find out more, here are some people you can contact:

- my email [email address]
- my mum's email [mum's email address] and [mobile number]
- Sarah and Susanne, the school nurses [school nurse emails]

Alternatively, here are some good websites:

- JDRF - www.jdrf.org.uk
- BBC Health - www.bbc.co.uk/health/physical_health/conditions/in_depth/diabetes/
- CBBC Newsround (Diabetes explained quite simply) - http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_1670000/newsid_1679500/1679502.stm
- The Type 1 Mom Song on YouTube (it's American and quite mad, but it is accurate at what living with Type 1 is really like!) - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDATgiMwRNA&feature=player_embedded
- UK Children with Diabetes Advocacy Group - <http://www.childrenwithdiabetesuk.org/>
- INPUT - <http://www.input.me.uk/>
- US Children with Diabetes www.childrenwithdiabetes.com/