



## **Type 1 diabetes - a long-term condition**

*Type 1 diabetes: Clemmy's story*

### **CLEMMY**

My name's Clemmy and I have diabetes. I was diagnosed when I was 13 and I live with my parents in Reading. Before I was diagnosed I lost a lot of weight. For about a year I was very, very thin and at that point I was also getting a lot of eye infections. I had lots of ulcers in my mouth. I was exhausted. We went to the doctor's and they tested my urine for ketones and found that I was diabetic, at which point I was sent to hospital. For most diabetics they might be taking five units of insulin. I'll be taking 30 for a meal of the same amount. To inject that much insulin with a normal pen, which most diabetics would use, is really difficult because the insulin builds up and you have to inject very slowly for the insulin to be dispersed into your skin and your blood and, for me, I would be sitting there for about half an hour to get this amount of insulin into me without having a lot of pain, so I started getting big lumps on my skin where the insulin had just collected. It would bleed and at this point, because I wasn't very well, I was very, very thin as well, so it was even more difficult because there was not much fat on me to get the insulin into.

You're classed as a diabetic. It's just a group of diabetics, particularly if you're a teenager. They just class you as one of those and they think oh, you're just not doing what you should be doing, and maybe if they'd looked deeper into my background they would know that I don't drink, I don't smoke, I was trying really, really hard and it just wasn't working for me.

Sleeping is something I've had to factor into my life, it's not something I just do at the end of the day. I've had to think about when I'm going to be able to have a nap, so all during my school years I'd be coming home at sort of 4 o'clock after school and going straight to bed before dinner and then after dinner going to bed at nine and sleeping in till I had to get up for school, and then that would be the cycle every single day, just to be able to function.

As well as physical problems, it's not just that, it's mental issues as well so it's feeling down, it's feeling isolated, and knowingly, and that's something perhaps that medical professionals don't really prepare you for. When I did my work experience I went to the same hospital I was at, at the time, to look at the midwives and children being born, and obviously I don't look like I'm diabetic, and a doctor walking past made a smart remark to me about how women who are diabetic and having children shouldn't bother, it was an absolute nightmare, they were going to be really poorly, as was the baby, it was a real struggle, and it was almost pointless

having a child, especially if your sugar levels weren't good, and that really affected me. It was devastating. It makes you lose hope for the future, to the point when I was first at uni, and I still hadn't got it under control, I felt almost suicidal. Just before I was taking my 'A' levels I got very, very poorly and I had to go into hospital and they said I was near death and, at that point, we decided that we had to do something, and getting a pump was really the only option for me.

### **CLEMMY'S MUM**

We needed to sort of fight for a pump because you needed so much insulin.

### **CLEMMY**

It wasn't going to just be given to me.

### **CLEMMY'S MUM**

They just thought I was interfering, and this attitude that you had to take responsibility for everything yourself, and I just thought that was such a hard thing. When you were doing your 'A' levels I was working part-time. You couldn't drive at that stage, but you were so exhausted I had to put my hours down to half a day a week, so that I could transport you backwards and forwards to school, in between all your classes, because you couldn't possibly have gone on public transport, you were so exhausted. And then you ended up in hospital and at that stage, when you were 18, we were really trying to fight them for a pump.

### **CLEMMY**

Eventually I moved hospital, and at this hospital I was given immediate psychiatric support, as was my Mum, and a mixture of that support and having the pump has gradually meant that I've managed to get my sugar levels under control.

This is my insulin pump. I have it attached to me 24 hours a day, apart from when I have showers. This streams insulin into me constantly. Over an hour I can inject the same amount of insulin I would have to do in a minute with the needles and the pens, so it means it's much less painful for me to inject, and it gives me better control as well because the insulin can work on my meal and break it down a lot slower, which is how the insulin should be used anyway. When I eat meals I obviously top up with an extra boost of insulin to counteract the meal I'm having, and I literally just can press buttons whilst it's attached to me, quite discreetly, and put that extra insulin into myself. So the pump is definitely a really positive thing in my life.

For the first year at uni I found it incredibly difficult and in the end I decided that I had to choose between the social life and the degree, and I chose the degree, so I would be going to my lessons and then going back to my uni room and sleeping. People just didn't understand

that and, at one point, a boy texted me by mistake saying oh, she's cancelled on me again, you know, oh she's so boring and annoying, I'm not going to bother inviting her out again and I sort of, I was really upset because I sort of thought actually I just can't come, it's not a case of not wanting to.

You got very against me eating anything sweet and chocolate, and I'm such a chocoholic, and it was really difficult because if you ever found out I'd eaten anything it would cause an argument, and it put so much pressure on our relationship because I'd be hiding it from you, and I'd be pretending to take my sugar levels, or diluting it down with water, I'd be diluting it.

**CLEMMY'S MUM**

I don't miss anything, do I?

**CLEMMY**

No, but to get to the point where you feel like you have to dilute your blood with water, so that your Mum is pleased with you, it wasn't your fault, but it was just how I felt. I felt like I was disappointing everyone.

**CLEMMY'S MUM**

All the time you've been at university I've been coming up once a week to support you, the whole three years, haven't I?

**CLEMMY**

Yeah.

**CLEMMY'S MUM**

To try and, you know.

**CLEMMY**

Help me.

**CLEMMY'S MUM**

Help you, and keep things going, and it's only really been this last year that I'll actually be able to come into university, and you've been well enough for us to really enjoy, enjoy London, and to go out to the theatre, or go for a nice meal together.

**CLEMMY**

So now I'm nearly 22. I've had the pump since I was 19, and over the past year my sugars have reached a point where they're brilliant, they're really good, and I'm in a much better place. So now I'm a lot more positive, and in future I hope to do things that I couldn't imagine

doing before, and I have a lot of hope that I'll be able to hold down a job and still to be able to do things in the evening and, you know, just do normal things and have a normal life, which is all you ever really want.