

# A century of DIABETES BREAKTHROUGHS

2021 marks **ONE HUNDRED YEARS** since the discovery of insulin, a milestone that initiated a wave of innovation in how diabetes would be viewed and managed. One hundred years ago, life expectancy for someone with diabetes was limited as there were **NO AVAILABLE TREATMENTS** and limited understanding of what caused the condition or how to manage it.

The past century has seen many breakthroughs in diabetes management including:



Evolution of blood glucose testing technologies



Greater public understanding of diabetes and risk factors



Rise of social media and online support communities



Digitisation of diabetes care and data sharing



Emergence of new treatment classes and administration options

The progress made in the past century has had significant impact on quality of life for people living with diabetes:



**CATHERINE**  
*Dundalk*

World kickboxing champion Catherine started experiencing symptoms while she was competing internationally in some of the highest levels of the sport. She started suffering from extreme fatigue, going to the toilet more than usual, and significant weight loss. Following her diagnosis of type 1 diabetes, Catherine was worried about what it would mean for her athletic career and found that there wasn't much information or support available around day-to-day management. Since then, she has overcome her concerns and the 'burnout' of constantly managing her condition to win a further four world titles. She believes that if you establish patterns that work for you and integrate diabetes management into your routine, you can achieve anything you put your mind to.



**SHUKRAT**  
*Sheffield*

Shukrat trained as a doctor in Nigeria and was initially diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 16 years ago. However, after struggling to keep her blood sugar levels under control, clinicians determined that she did in fact have type 1 diabetes. At first, Shukrat found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that diabetes is a lifelong condition and did not fully understand how much it would affect every aspect of her life. In time, Shukrat felt more confident in making her own day-to-day management decisions with support from training courses, clinicians and specialist diabetes nurses. She has also embraced innovations such as continuous glucose monitors which have significantly improved her blood glucose control. Peer support has proved crucial and Shukrat urges anyone who has been diagnosed with diabetes to seek out support networks of their own.



**JAMES**  
*Derby*

James was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes after experiencing symptoms during a half term holiday when he was 13 years old. His uncle already had diabetes, so he had some understanding of what his diagnosis would mean. James' sister has also been diagnosed with the same condition. They have a family WhatsApp group where they share questions and challenges they are facing which has been a great help over the years. James has attended webinars run by a consultant in his local hospital which have helped him understand how his blood sugar levels act. Despite the advances in testing, James hopes that one day he will have access to more convenient treatment options.



**CORMAC**  
*Dublin*

Cormac was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes over 30 years ago at the age of 11. From this young age, Cormac embraced the responsibility that comes with having diabetes and felt empowered to manage his condition. He tries to live life to the full and has not let diabetes get in the way of his passion for world travel. Cormac believes that technology is the route to a cure, and he has embraced technological innovations which have offered him greater freedom. He is grateful for the support of the online community and wishes for everyone to have access to education, support and new innovations.



**AISLING**  
*Limerick*

Aisling was just 13 months old when she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Her first recollection of living with diabetes is when she was a young child and able to start taking her own blood sugar levels. Aisling has a positive outlook on her diabetes as it has always felt like a part of her. As she grew up, education and empowerment became increasingly important as she transitioned from paediatric to adult care, and the emergence of online communities has helped her build friendships and support networks.



**VALERIE**  
*Cork*

Valerie's seven-year-old twin girls have both been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, one aged 2 1/2 and one at 4 years old. Both her daughters accept their diabetes and are happy and healthy now that it is under control. After the first diagnosis, Valerie had to quickly overcome her own phobia of needles and come to terms with injecting her daughters several times a day. As the girls have grown up, Valerie has worked hard to involve them in their diabetes management by educating them on food and monitoring and making mealtimes as fun as possible. Advances in technology have offered Valerie peace of mind as she can monitor her daughters' blood sugar levels remotely and she is excited to see what advances the future may bring for the diabetes community.



**MELANIE**  
*Cardiff*

Melanie is a mother, athlete and social media influencer who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when she was 13 years old. After her diagnosis, she worried about what her condition would mean for her future but she hasn't let it hold her back. At the age of 16, Melanie took up athletics and competed at an international level for Wales. Her most rewarding role has been becoming a mother. Managing diabetes alongside pregnancy was incredibly challenging, partly down to the significant number of medical appointments. However, seeing other mums with type 1 diabetes helped her stay positive. Melanie feels that innovations in diabetes care have allowed people to spend less time thinking about their condition, but she is also excited about what may come in the future to make management more tailored to the individual and to reduce risk of complications.



**KALEX**  
*London*

Kalex is a radio presenter who was recently diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. He has always lived a healthy life, keeping very active and regularly going to the gym. He didn't recognise any problematic symptoms, but he was losing weight which he attributed to success in the gym. It was only after a colleague suggested he get checked that Kalex was diagnosed. After having to get over the initial hurdle of testing and managing his diabetes in public, Kalex feels like he has come to terms with living with diabetes.

Despite the progress made in the past century, there is still much to be done to improve outcomes and quality of life for all those living with diabetes:



Continue efforts to develop new treatments, monitoring options and refine diabetes care to meet the needs of the future



Improve access to care by reducing the impact of health inequalities



Recognise the burden and provide greater support to those who live with diabetes

To learn more about diabetes, visit:

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/>

<https://www.diabetes.ie/>