

Diabetes Week highlights the rising number of cases among young people



According to the Scottish Diabetes Survey there were 3,733 under 20s with Type 1 diabetes in Scotland at the end of 2013, and 1,860 under 15. The total number of people with diabetes is 268,154, of which 29,261 have type 1, 10.9 per cent of the total.

The increase of Type 1 cases reflects the rising incidence in children and young people, and that people with the condition are now living longer. Type 1 is primarily an inherited condition.

Diabetes Week takes place from 8 – 14 June and Diabetes UK Scotland would like you to share your stories of courage and hope in the face of diabetes on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram using the hashtag #iCan and copying in @DiabetesScot.

When Ellie McGuinty, a 16 year old from Silverknowes in Edinburgh, found out she had Type 1 diabetes 16 months ago she was shocked and upset.

The Edinburgh teenager had been doing athletics since the age of eight, training several times a week and had a bright sporting future ahead of her.

Ellie, 16, recalls: “I was drinking and going to the toilet a lot, always tired and had lost a lot of weight. I was also getting a lot of injuries during my training. I went to my GP who knew straight away. They actually came out into the surgery car park to tell us I had type 1 diabetes.

“It was a shock to begin with. My first question was would I have to give up my athletics? They said it shouldn’t be a problem, which was a big relief. There’s a lot of information to take in but you have to learn it as it’s all about keeping yourself healthy.”

“Initially I felt different but you shouldn’t feel like that – it’s just a condition and you learn to live with it.”

When Ellie was first diagnosed in February 2013 she had to check her blood sugar levels before, during and after training and make sure she had sugary snacks and drinks on hand in case her levels dropped. She was also preparing to do her Standard grades at the same time. She admits: “Sometimes it felt all too much but I managed to get through it in the end.”

Her coaches at Edinburgh Athletics Club were given information on her diabetes and were very supportive. Ellie, who competes in the Pentathlon doing the 800 metres, high jump, long jump, hurdles and shot putt has since been selected twice to represent Scotland in her age group for Pentathlon and Javelin. Ellie was also selected for a Scottish Athletics relay training programme for the country’s top sprinters in her age group, and was recently short listed for the Edinburgh Evening News’s Pride of Edinburgh Sporting Achievement Award.

She plans to move onto the Heptathlon, adding the 200 metres and javelin to her repertoire, and is looking forward to watching her athletic heroes competing at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games this summer. And if all goes to plan, she could be wearing the Scotland vest herself in future Games.

“I would never let diabetes stop me doing my sport,” she says.

Ellie was fortunate enough to have an insulin pump fitted recently which makes it easier to control her blood sugar levels, and praises the “amazing” diabetes nurses at the Sick Kids Hospital in Edinburgh for their support.

“I had crazy readings before an exam. My mum phoned our diabetes nurse who was so supportive – she rang back within an hour and told me exactly what to do.”

Mum Lyndi says she was initially “devastated” by her youngest daughter’s diagnosis.

“My nephew has type 1 diabetes and leads a full life, so that helped a bit. He gave us advice but I didn’t realise how much was involved. It’s a constant balancing act. Everything can affect you, even the weather. You have to be very organised and can’t be spontaneous. Changes in routine – such as exams and holidays – can affect you as well.”

“I’ve helped (and nagged!) her but I’ve also encouraged her to be independent in managing her diabetes to prepare her for when she leaves home and hopefully goes off to university.”

Edinburgh teenager Laura Woodhead (aged 15) was volunteering at a children’s farm in West Lothian in March 2013 when she suddenly felt dizzy and faint. She had been feeling thirsty for a couple of weeks, had lost a lot of weight and had been going to the toilet frequently the previous night, but was otherwise perfectly healthy.

Her dad took her to a nearby café and bought her a piece of chocolate cake, thinking she was hungry and needing a bit of sugar for energy! Luckily she didn’t eat the cake and was taken to St John’s Hospital followed by the Edinburgh Sick Kids Hospital for a series of tests. A doctor then dropped the bombshell that she had Type 1 diabetes.

Parents Dave and Catherine were understandably upset by their daughter’s sudden diagnosis and initially were concerned that it was their fault in some way, but the doctor quickly reassured them that Type 1 diabetes is an auto-immune condition so there was no way they could have prevented it. They say their 14-year-old daughter was very calm and took all the information on board very maturely.

Catherine recalls: "Laura sent us for a walk as she said she wanted some time on her own. When we came back , she told us "I am not ill, I just have a condition I need to manage."

Laura had a "hypo" (hypoglycaemia triggered when blood sugar levels fall too low,) on her first day out of hospital which, understanding the potentially fatal consequences, was scary but she was determined from the outset not to let her condition stand in her way.

She completed her bronze Duke of Edinburgh expedition just six weeks later. "The leaders took my heavy stuff in the car so there was less risk of the exhaustion causing my blood sugar to drop dangerously low. However our group got lost and a six-hour walk became nine and a half hours and we arrived at the campsite in the dark, too late to cook. I had to test my blood sugar levels every hour and eat a snack – I was sick of jelly babies by the end of the weekend!"

Two weeks later, Laura went on a school trip to Italy, despite her parents' concerns. Laura says: "One of the nurses spoke to the teacher leading the trip about my condition and she took a spare diabetes kit in her bag. I also took a small set of scales to weigh my pizzas as I wasn't so good at guessing the right portions then! The fact I could manage that trip showed me that, although I can never forget about my diabetes, it won't hold me back."

Soon afterwards the family enjoyed a holiday to Canada including whitewater rafting and zip line trips, which was nerve-wracking and took careful planning as Laura couldn't take her blood monitoring kit on the trips. She has recently sat her National 5 exams, and is keen to pursue nursing or medicine, acknowledging that her experience has sparked her interest in pursuing these careers.

Laura is currently on the waiting list for an insulin pump which should make her diabetes easier to control and eliminate

the need for multiple daily injections, although she is disappointed that there is such a long wait to get one. She says that “The care and support from the Diabetes Team at Sick Kids has been amazing and has definitely helped me to cope with my diagnosis and given me the confidence to get on with life as normally as possible.”

Her mum Catherine says: “My advice to other young people is go for it – don’t let the condition hold you back. Laura is very independent. It’s important for young people to take control so they can go out with their friends and not be too reliant on their parents. At times it’s very difficult as a parent to stand back and let her do all the things she wants to but it’s only fair and it’s great that she has taken it all in her stride.

“Also be open with your friends so they can support you. Laura’s friends will say to her “you look a bit pale – do you need to test?” Knowing her friends realise how serious diabetes can potentially be and are looking out for her gives me peace of mind.”

Submitted by [Kirsty Innes](#)

