

Living with diabetes

FOR 50 YEARS PLUS

Bernadette O'Donnell keeps her A1C under 7 by following her lifelong strict dietary regime, writes **Sheila O'Kelly**

Bernadette O'Donnell was the first recipient of the Diabetes Federation of Ireland commemorative medal for people who have lived with diabetes for 50 years. Now seven years later Diabetes Ireland caught up with Bernadette again at the Federation's Diabetes Awareness Exhibition.

When Bernadette was diagnosed as a young nurse, she was forced to give up her career.

"When I got diabetes first an uncle of mine used always say, 'there's no need

for you to work Bernadette, I'll look after you'. I thought there was no way I was going to sit back. I was determined I was going to work," says Bernadette.

And she did.

"When I got stabilised I went to work in the Shelbourne hotel starting at 7am and working every second night until 11pm. After 10 years I left to get married. Back then when you got married you had to give up work," says Bernadette.

Bernadette was widowed after 15 years of marriage and was left with four children to bring up. One of her two daughters, Anne Marie, developed diabetes when she was 10 years old. When Anne Marie left school, she too wanted to be a nurse, but also faced discrimination and at that time was not allowed to do nursing in Ireland. She did hotel and catering in Canada for seven years, but then the regulations in Irish nursing changed and Anne Marie was able to come back to Ireland and train here.

"Anne Marie completed her nursing training successfully, and is working in Letterkenny Hospital

where she absolutely loves her job," says Bernadette.

Bernadette has two grandchildren and is still fit and sprightly enough to be able to enjoy them. She says that she is still very strict with her diet and long ago cut all sugary foods.

"I still have to watch out. If I was high in the morning I would avoid something like muesli because all the dried fruit would send me high; instead I would have porridge," says Bernadette.

Bernadette tests her self four times a day without fail.

"I think it is important, particularly when going to bed at night. The nurse told me, and the nurse we have in Letterkenny is better than any doctor, said never go to bed under 10. And she is dead right. Because you won't go too low. If you live on your own you can't afford to go too low.

"I would then test when I get up, and at lunchtime and teatime.

"I wouldn't be great at exercise because I do suffer a lot with my feet. I suffer with burning feet.

"I go to the chiropodist every couple of months. I have had a knee replacement so I have difficulty getting down to my feet. I couldn't cut my own toenails.

"I go and get my eyes tested every year. I look after everything. I don't neglect anything," says Bernadette.

Bernadette is very happy with the health care she receives from her diabetes team. She says diabetes care has improved dramatically over the years.

