

Taking diabetes in their stride

These teenagers all deal with their condition in an admirable matter of fact way, writes **Sheila O'Kelly**



Ian Duggan: says his insulin pump has made life much easier

Ian Duggan

I am 13 years old and I have had diabetes since January 2007. It was the first day back to school after the Christmas holidays, my mam called me to get up for school and I collapsed. My mam thought I was messing and didn't want to go to school, but then realised I wasn't. She took me to our doctor who immediately suspected diabetes and sent us to Temple Street Hospital.

When I was first seen in A&E my blood glucose was 12.4 and they were going to send me home but they checked a second time for ketones and my ketones were high. They just said "Ian has diabetes" and that was that.

Looking back over that Christmas my mam and dad realised little things all put together added up to diabetes, but at the time hadn't even thought about it. I was much more tired, so thirsty, I couldn't even eat my Christmas dinner (we should have guessed then that something was seri-



Rachel O'Neill and her mother Audrey backstage with the Jonas Brothers

ously wrong!) and I'd lost a bit of weight.

I stayed in Temple Street for three days. We all had so much to learn and to take in and despite the injections I really enjoyed my stay in hospital.

Did having diabetes change my life? I don't think so. I still got up every day and went to school and went to play and remained involved in all my clubs. Going out involved more organising, packing my bag and making sure I had food, drinks, Lucozade, my carbohydrate book and weighing scales. Meal times became more regimented and we had to carbohydrate count and weigh everything. I think most of the changes affected my mam and dad. They had more to do to make sure I had an ordinary life.

Initially I was on insulin twice a day by injection. This changed over time to insulin pens four times a day and finally in February 2011 I received my insulin pump. I can not imagine life without my pump. It has made living with diabetes much easier. I have more choice of when I eat and what I eat. I can reduce my insulin prior to activities and sports so I don't have to fill up on carbs beforehand and don't have a low after. I don't have to have four injections a day and I can honestly say I have the same life and freedom

as any of my friends.

Diabetes isn't a nice thing to have. Some people are ignorant about what it is and think I have it cause I ate too much sweets when I was younger. But it hasn't stopped me from living my life. I am on tennis, archery and swim teams. I am almost fully qualified in life saving. I go out with my friends and do normal things. Some people look when I check my blood sugars or stare at me programming my pump but I don't care. If anyone asks I explain. I am not ashamed of what I have, but I do hope for a cure.

Rachel O'Neill

My name is Rachel. I am 13 years old. When I was 10 my mum noticed I was drinking a lot and going to the toilet so she brought me for a blood test. I was then diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.

I was scared at first as I didn't know what was going on, but the doctors explained everything very well. I was using syringes twice a day for the first couple of weeks, but quickly moved on to the pens.

When I was in hospital my sister texted me to tell me that Nick Jonas had diabetes too. I thought if he can live his crazy pop star life with diabetes, I can live my

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normal one. I then won a competition through Diabetes Ireland to go to the Jonas Brother's concert and to my surprise I met them. When my mum told Nick I had diabetes, he signed my blood kit and gave me a signed guitar pick. He said he gives these to all of his 'diabetic buddies'.

I was nervous about checking my bloods and doing injections in school but my friends helped me out. They even used to try and guess what my bloods were. I did a presentation about diabetes to my class to help them understand it. I have always done my injections myself and change my own sets. I got the pump in 2010. I think it's brilliant; I especially love the cool pump skins.

I count the carbs for my meals which can be a pain sometimes. I also find having to fill in my bloods into the log book annoying.

I'm not much of a sporty person, but I do ballet twice a week. When doing ballet I either take a small snack beforehand or reduce my basal [the 24-hour regular doses of insulin] rate. I take part in the Teen Activity Day organised by Diabetes Ireland every year. It is great fun and good to meet people your own age who have diabetes too.

Having diabetes isn't too bad; there are perks like getting to drink Lucozade during class when you're low or missing school days for appointments. To any teenager who has been newly diagnosed don't be afraid to tell people about your diabetes, the more people that know the better.

Laura Bourke

I'm Laura Bourke and I'm 14 years old. I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes three years ago. I was on holidays in Switzerland with my family at the time. As you can expect I was taking advantage of the never ending chocolate supplies in the Swiss shops. I felt extremely sick the whole time. I was drinking loads and running to the toilet every five minutes. My mum and dad thought it was just that I wasn't used to the hot weather or the food over there.

The day after I came home I still wasn't



Laura Bourke: advises anyone newly diagnosed that it does get easier and to stay strong

feeling well so my mum brought me to the doctor. He told me I had diabetes and that I had to go to the hospital straight away. This was a massive shock for me and my family. I didn't really know what diabetes was and I didn't understand why everyone was so worried.

When we got to the hospital and everything was explained to me I was upset. I knew that this would change my whole life and I kept thinking 'why is this happening to me?' I was afraid my friends wouldn't understand and would single me out because of it. I soon realised that people were really supportive and made it as easy for me as possible.

My mum and dad did my injections for the first few months. I was on two a day. One in the morning and one before my dinner. After a couple of months I decided I wanted to do my injections myself, and found it much easier.

When diagnosed, I was doing swimming lessons and horse riding. I continued swimming for a while but gave it up a year later. I still do horse riding and I found that having diabetes has given me the courage to try and progress it further. Having diabetes has made me realise the importance of exercise and a healthy diet.

If I was to give advice to anyone who is newly diagnosed with diabetes I would tell them to stay strong because it does get easier and having diabetes hasn't changed my life in one way or stopped me from doing what I want. Although it

may seem like a big change it's not all that bad.

Orla Gardiner

My name is Orla Gardiner and I am 13 years old. I was first diagnosed with type 1 diabetes about a week before my seventh birthday. At first my parents didn't understand what was wrong with me as I was drinking a lot of water, feeling sick and looked pale.

They then realised that I might have diabetes because my dad had been diagnosed with diabetes four years before me. They checked my bloods on daddy's meter and the readings showed that my bloods were very high. They then checked my ketones, which were really high as well. They brought me into Letterkenny General Hospital. My mum told me afterwards that she felt so bad because they suspected I was diabetic, but I was really excited about going to stay in a hospital.

The doctors took blood tests and when they came back the results showed that I was diabetic. I wasn't really sure what to think because I was used to seeing daddy taking his injections and checking his bloods every day, but I never thought that it would happen to me so I didn't take any notice when he did take injections and check his bloods.



Orla Gardiner: she met her best friend Eimear, who also has diabetes, when their mothers set up a parents' support group

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The doctor got me an insulin pen and an orange and told me to practise sticking the needle into the orange which I didn't mind. I remember my primary school teacher came in to see me and the first thing that she saw was me squirting insulin into an orange!

I don't remember much about after the few weeks I was diagnosed or how I adapted to it either. Since I was so young it became second nature to me but most of the weight was put on my mum and dad.

At first my mum would come to my school during lunch time to check my bloods but soon I became more confident about doing it myself. When I was diagnosed I did the injections myself at breakfast and dinner. About a year later I was referred to Crumlin hospital in Dublin because of problems with my diabetes control. At that stage they decided to change my insulin, which meant that

my mum had to mix the insulin and she started giving me my injections.

Three years ago I got the pump, which controls my blood sugars better and I would never want to go back to the injections because the pump gives me more freedom.

I do most things with the pump myself such as giving boluses [top-up insulin doses] and changing the set every two days. My mum sets the basal [the 24-hour regular doses of insulin] rates and any other changes.

I have started different sports since I was diagnosed such as swimming, horse riding, tennis and basketball. Having diabetes has never stopped me trying anything new. I always try to be prepared before any activity by eating before and after and I always have my meter and Lucozade nearby in case I ever need it.

My best friend Eimear has diabetes as well. We met through our mums when

they set up a parents' support group in Donegal. We met in fifth class and we're both in second year now and in the same class. She also has the pump and we're great support for each other.

The positive about having diabetes is that you meet new friends. There's a family weekend for people with diabetes in the family every year. It's a great way to meet new people and catch up with old friends. I look forward to going to it every year. I'm also more careful about what I eat since I was diagnosed. The negatives about having diabetes are that I always need my meter and Lucozade with me and if anyone see's me checking my bloods or see my pump they ask what they are I find it hard to explain and don't know what to say.

My advice to newly diagnosed people with diabetes is to never give up and there's nothing that you can't do if you have diabetes.

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