

Learning to control the fear



Cathrina Clarke has learned how to use medication and understand her diabetes so she can live a normal life, writes **Sheila O'Kelly**

Cathrina Clarke was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 10 years ago. Even though she has a strong family history, the diagnosis still came as a shock.

In fact, as she already knew about the complications that can develop as a result of having type 2 diabetes, she was quite afraid of the diagnosis.

Until Cathrina attended one of Diabetes Ireland's CODE (Community Oriented Diabetes Education) courses, she battled with the fear of falling into a coma or her blood sugars going too high.

She lived a regimented routine and was afraid to go anywhere on her own. Cathrina is a widow and lives in Drogheda with her two children, who are in their 20s.

However, Cathrina was reluctant to start on the tablets she needed so that her body could cope with diabetes.

"When the medication wasn't working I wasn't thinking along the lines that I need to get my medication changed. I felt I'm after losing the battle again and no matter what I do, this is just going to

get worse and worse. I now know that the reality of it is, no matter what you do it may get worse," said Cathrina.

Once-daily insulin injection

When later, Cathrina needed to start on a daily insulin injection, she fought this too. But after attending the CODE course she understood better what the medication was for.

"I was surprised when I went on the CODE course because I learned so much. The invaluable bit was clearing out my head. It had always been in my head 24/7, whereas you don't need to live like that. You just get on with it. It's not this big thing that you're going to drop down dead. The big fear for me would have been collapsing in public," says Cathrina.

"I am sorry I didn't do the course when it was first suggested to me two years ago," said Cathrina.

CODE diabetes education

Before doing CODE Cathrina's day was

entirely structured around when she thought she needed to eat.

"We went out for the day to Newry a couple of weeks ago and it must have been 3 o'clock when we were having something to eat and there was no panic about it. Now if that was before I did the course I'd have had them scoured. Whether I needed to eat or not, I used to have it in my head that I had to eat at 1 o'clock. The whole day would have revolved around the time. I'd say 'no I have to go' and by the time we'd get to have something to eat I'd be in that big of a panic. I'd be shaking and everything and it might not have anything to do with the diabetes at all."

Cathrina says she learned from CODE that changes to medication and needing insulin could be inevitable as time goes on. They were not a signal that she was eating the incorrect diet or had done anything wrong. Medication should be used as a tool to manage the condition. It is the changes to her medication and understanding how it works, that have

LIFE STORY

allowed Cathrina to manage her condition without panicking.

Cathrina says she feels much freer now that her medication has been changed and that she understands her condition better. Now, she enjoys being able to have the occasional dessert when out with friends.

"I learned to accept that it isn't anything you're doing. I always had this in my head that there had to be something I was doing. Insulin was something I never wanted to take, but it has changed my life. I can get up in the mornings and take my blood and it's on target. On the course I learned I can lead a normal life.

Dealing with lows

"Lows had been a big problem for me. I would panic and then I'd shovel the sweets into me – anything I got my hands

on. Then I'd be dying for two days. My blood sugars would spike and my whole body would go into overload. Whereas now I'm calmer about it.

"When I do feel a bit low now I just don't panic. I saunter and take something like orange juice and then wait. It took the panic out of it. Even though there's a family history there and I would have known about it and how to deal with it. When it's yourself it's different," said Cathrina.

Cathrina's A1C (long-term blood sugar levels) has been better now since her medication was changed.

"At one stage I was out of work with stress. My bloods were off the wall at that stage. I spent years battling my diabetes instead of just accepting it and saying this isn't going to go away. You're lucky if you get a couple of years stable and some

people are stable for a longer time than others," said Cathrina.

Diabetic Watch

Cathrina attends a GP practice in Drogheda which runs a Diabetic Watch scheme. Under this scheme, Cathrina's diabetes is checked every three months by the practice nurse. If there are any problems one of the GPs will see her for a further check.

The practice also makes sure that Cathrina has her eyes and feet checked every year. Cathrina says the regular checks are very important to her as her father's sight was damaged by poorly controlled diabetes.

Being checked every three months limits the amount of time for diabetes to spiral out of control and thus reduces the complications it can cause.

Who's on your diabetes awareness list this year?

This Christmas, promote diabetes awareness among your family and friends with our top quality Christmas cards



EARLY ORDER BOOKING FORM

Peace set (12 cards per pack)	Contemporary set (12 cards per pack)	Traditional set (12 cards per pack)	Religious set (12 cards per pack)	Card type at €6 per pack of 12 (all cards 135mm square)	Number of packs	Cost
				Peace		
				Contemporary		
				Traditional		
				Religious		
Post and packaging 1-2 packs: €2.50; 3-4 packs: €4.50 5-7 packs €7.50; 8-10 packs: €9.00						
				Total		

Send to: Diabetes Ireland, 19 Northwood House, Northwood Business Campus, Dublin 9.
Please make cheques payable to DIABETES FEDERATION OF IRELAND.
To order by credit card, please fill in this form or phone (low call) 1850 909 909 or (01) 842 8118
Shop online at www.diabetes.ie

Deliver to:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Credit card details

Visa ☐ Master card ☐ Laser card ☐

Card no:

Expiry date: CVC no:

Name of cardholder: _____