

# Strength, resilience and mental health

**Deborah Condon** talks to Stephen Mooney about his journey with Type 1 diabetes



Being active is known to benefit people with diabetes and personal trainer, Stephen Mooney, can certainly attest to that. Diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 11, he now runs a successful personal training business, which he says has helped both his physical and mental health. The Dublin-based trainer, who is now 28, was on holiday in Germany when symptoms first occurred.

"I remember it all very clearly. I was very thirsty, my energy was low, I had lost weight fast and I constantly needed to use the toilet – all the typical symptoms," he recalls.

However, while many people may be unfamiliar with these symptoms, Stephen says his mother "knew exactly what was happening", as Stephen's father and two brothers also had Type 1.

On their return to Dublin, she brought him to the Mater Hospital's Diabetes Day Centre, where it was "sorted very fast".

Stephen says that while he was aware of diabetes as a result of his father and brothers, because of his age, he "wasn't too clued in on how it all worked".

"I had a rough idea, but I wasn't too clear on it. There was a lot of emotions. I was definitely confused and scared and at the age of 11, I had a real sweet tooth, so I knew it was going to have a big impact on me eating sweets," he notes.

Stephen was an active child and at that stage, rugby and tennis were his two main sports. While he was not afraid that he would have to stop playing, he did worry that his diabetes might affect it in some way, and he was aware that he would have to be a bit more careful about things than other children.

At the age of 16, Stephen started going to a gym and "fell in love with it". However, he admits that his diabetes control at that time "wasn't great".

"It wasn't disastrous, but it should have been a lot better than it was. It was all part of being a teen. I was very self-conscious around my diabetes. In school, if I had to do an injection for lunch, I would leave the class and go to the toilet because I didn't want to do it in front of people. I didn't feel comfortable.

"That had a big effect on me to be honest and lasted quite a long time. It's only in the last few years I've decided 'right, I can do this in public, I'm not going to hide it anymore'. It's a big mental game with diabetes as well," he says.

While it wasn't anything specific that caused his change of mind, he does recall one night when he decided to inject insulin in front of people.

"I remember I was out for a meal with my family and I would normally go to the toilet to do my injection. My brother has never had an issue doing it at the table and that day, I just thought 'I'm going to do it at the table, I don't care what anyone thinks'. So I just did it and it wasn't a big deal. I don't know what I was so scared about. Ever since then, I have had no problem," he says.

Stephen found that working out in the gym led to positive physical changes, which also helped him feel better about himself. He started to see some benefits with his diabetes and these have become more pronounced in recent years.

"Exercise increases your insulin sensitivity, which was the big thing with me, and it also helps with the mental health

side of things," he points out.

He also began using the Dexcom earlier this year, which he has found works "really well" for him and has already led to an improvement in his HbA1c.

Stephen's route to becoming a personal trainer was not a straight road. Despite not loving the academic side of things in school, he went to college to study tourism and marketing.

"Similar to school, I didn't love it but I didn't hate it either. I was progressing but I wasn't enjoying it. Eventually I called it a day. It was my brother who said to me, 'you love health and fitness, so why don't you give personal training a go?' I thought it was a great idea so I did a course and got my certificate in it."

Stephen had been working in a gym when the Covid-19 pandemic began, so his job was immediately impacted.

"I decided to go off and do my own thing, so established Monitor Fitness. I recently started working out of a new premises in Dun Laoghaire and I also provide training online. That has obviously become increasingly popular as a result of Covid. I am hoping to specifically help people with Type 1 diabetes," he explains.

Stephen insists you don't have to stop doing the things you love if you develop diabetes, but eating a balanced diet and keeping up an exercise regimen are key.

"There are a lot of things to think about with Type 1 and your mental health can also be tested, so having a healthy lifestyle goes a long way towards helping to control the condition," he adds.

For more information on Monitor Fitness, visit: [https://www.instagram.com/monitorfitness\\_1/](https://www.instagram.com/monitorfitness_1/)