

I was so tired all the time and couldn't figure out why — it was type 2 diabetes

When Deirdre McTeigue was told she had type 2 diabetes, it came as a complete shock. However, learning about the condition and the lifestyle changes required set her mind at ease, she tells **Arlene Harris**

Almost 270,000 people in Ireland are currently living with diabetes, with the vast majority (234,398) having Type 2 — and according to a recent Healthy Ireland survey, it is expected that this figure will increase by 60pc over the next 10 to 15 years.

This is an alarming statistic as people with Type 2 diabetes also run a greater risk of developing one or more severe health complications. These can include cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, blindness, and lower limb amputation, which can greatly impact their independence and quality of life.

According to experts, there is often no obvious reason why people develop Type 2 diabetes, which is the third most diagnosed condition in Ireland, but it can be hereditary and those who are overweight are also more at risk. However, there are a number of ways in which people living with the condition can significantly improve their health which will in turn, reduce the risk of developing more severe health issues and potentially put their diabetes into remission.

To help them on the road to a healthier future, a new interactive education platform has just been developed by Diabetes Ireland with support from Novo Nordisk. The free programme, Diabetes Smart, will provide information and advice which will help people to become more aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and help them to manage their condition more effectively.

Sinead Powell, Senior Dietitian and Regional Development Officer with Diabetes Ireland says the pandemic has made it difficult for some people to visit their GP, so the new online programme is very welcome.

"We in Diabetes Ireland frequently hear how a diagnosis of diabetes can be difficult to accept as people have to learn to adapt to a whole new way of living," she says. "The pandemic has meant that some people living with Type 2 diabetes have felt more isolated or have had restricted or reduced access to healthcare professionals — so this free educational resource provides support and advice to people in the comfort of their own homes."

"It uses real-life stories to guide users in managing and taking control of their condition, so they can approach their diagnosis with a sense of purpose and help them formulate their own treatment goals."

Deirdre McTeigue is one of the many people with Type 2 diabetes who had found it difficult to come to terms with her condition.

"I had been borderline diabetic for the past 10 years as I am quite overweight so that was always a big factor," she says.

"I have also had ulcerative colitis for the past 30 years and have asthma as well, so I was invited to join a wellness programme for older people which involved getting medical checks every six months. And last August (2021), after some blood tests, I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, which, despite the fact that I had been borderline for ages, came as a big shock to me — to be honest, I'm still struggling with it. But at the same time it was a bit of a relief to find out what was wrong, as I had been so tired all the time and couldn't figure out why."



Deirdre McTeigue
from Portmarnock

PHOTO: STEVE HUMPHREYS

"As someone who used to have a lot of energy, I was absolutely floored after my grandchildren visited in the summer. I also felt thirsty a lot and now I know that this is another sign of diabetes."

The retired social worker was put on medication and advised to change her diet. Although she has noticed a difference, she does still have some way to go.

"I was put on Metformin initially but that interacted badly with my ileostomy, so I was getting very bad diarrhoea which was seeping out of my bag," says the Dublin woman. "So I spoke to my GP who said I would need to come off the medication and concentrate on my diet instead."

'It was a bit of a relief to find out what was wrong, as I had felt so tired and thirsty a lot'

"I was referred to a dietitian who was just super and gave me some great advice — in fact, I have lost a stone already — but I am finding it hard going. I know that losing weight can help to reverse diabetes, so I am really trying, but it's tough."

"My doctor told me that I have to eliminate sugar (apart from natural sugar), so I have stopped baking and can't have my homemade biscuits or Sunday afternoon cake anymore. However, I have been following the diet plan I was given and am trying to adopt the Mediterranean diet my daughter follows, and I also did a healthy eating course with Diabetes Ireland, which I found very good — so I'm going in the right direction."

The 72-year-old has been taking part in the Diabetes Smart Programme, which contains six interactive modules, and has also found it very beneficial.

"I really liked the visuals and the videos. As someone who is newly diagnosed, I'm still finding it all a bit daunting, so I like that I can go back and look at the information again," she says. "I also like that I can share the material with my husband and children so they can understand and better support me. And as I can share the information with them, I find that they are now more willing to come out walking with me and are more encouraging with the diet."

"Having diabetes is restrictive, but I now know that it's very manageable and we can't say that about a lot of illnesses. As a lady on

ABOUT DIABETES

● It is estimated that around 266,664 people live with diabetes in Ireland and of those, 234,398 live with Type 2 diabetes.

● Diabetes is the third most diagnosed condition in Ireland, and it is expected that the number of people with Type 2 diabetes will increase by 60pc over the next 10-15 years.

● You are more at risk of getting Type 2 diabetes if someone in your family has had it, if you are overweight or do not take enough physical activity, if you have high blood pressure or cholesterol, have had gestational diabetes or a baby weighing over 4.1kgs(10lbs).

● People over the age of 40 are also more at risk, particularly for those over 60 years. However, there has been an increase of Type 2 diabetes among children, adolescents, and younger adults.

● Symptoms include — being thirsty or having a dry mouth, needing to pass urine frequently, feeling tired all the time, genital irritation or thrush, blurred vision, slow-healing cuts or sores, numbness in hands or feet, unexplained weight loss or gain.

● People with Type 2 diabetes also run a greater risk of developing one or more severe health complications such as cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, blindness, and lower limb amputation, which can hugely impact their quality of life.

my course said to me, it is better to control diabetes, than let it control you."

Type 2 Diabetes like Deirdre's usually develops slowly in adulthood. It is progressive and can sometimes be treated with diet and exercise, but it may also require anti-diabetic medicine and/or insulin injections.

According to Powell, many people have found it hard to manage their condition during the recurring lockdowns, which is why the new information programme will be so beneficial.

"Due to the significant burden placed on GPs and the healthcare system over the last two years because of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people with Type 2 diabetes have not had regular review appointments with their GP or their diabetes team," she says.

"So as doctors and healthcare professionals are still currently heavily overstretched, the free Diabetes Smart programme will provide them with an educational tool which they can refer people living with Type 2 diabetes to — so they can learn about their condition and manage it more effectively, no matter how long they have been living with it."

"The programme has been developed by diabetes healthcare professionals to support a busy lifestyle and participants can pause their interactive learning at any stage of the journey and resume with ease."

For more information visit diabetes.ie and to access Diabetes Smart diabeteseducation.ie