

Transcript of an Interview With a Close Friend of Someone With Diabetes and an Eating Disorder [ED-DMT1]



Interview by Claire Kearns.

CK: Thank you for talking to DWED today about this topic, we know it can be a particularly sensitive issue so really appreciate it.

Were you aware of the signs of an eating disorder alongside type-one diabetes before knowing your friend?

No I wasn't. I don't think I'd ever heard of, or even would have connected the two things. I knew about diabetes, and I knew about eating disorders but I didn't really know anything about how they could be linked.

CK: What do you feel you have learnt about diabetes from having a friend with the condition, and also as to how a linked eating disorder can have great impact?

Well I think just having a friend with diabetes on its own I have learnt quite a lot. I feel I was quite ignorant on the basic things like the difference between type-one and type-two because they are conflated in the media so often and I wouldn't have been alert to that nor really understood the difference. I am probably guilty of absorbing some of the myths about thinking that you know, type-one diabetes is the same as type-two in that it could be caused by eating too much sugar or by becoming fat.

I've definitely learnt a lot about the role insulin plays, and I didn't realise how common it was in the way it can be wrapped up in eating disordered tendencies.

CK: Have you witnessed or heard about examples of good or bad treatment your friend may have received for her diabetes and eating disorder?

I have as she had a very, very bad experience in eating disorder treatment where because of their ignorance she didn't even receive basic standards of care which put her at a lot of risk. That was just

by the doctors and nurses not having any kind of knowledge of type-one diabetes at all really. The fact is they could have killed her which is really upsetting and shows what needs to be done. They just ignored the diabetes and did the blanket treatment that you would do for anyone with say anorexia or bulimia without the extra complications of diabetes, and I think you know, that's really quite shocking.

CK: How does having a type 1 diabetic friend concern you on a daily basis?

Even now I do have a bit of understanding I don't even feel I know too much about what to do when things go wrong or what to do . It can just be quite scary not knowing what could happen on a day to day basis.

CK: Does the prevalence of eating disorders in diabetics surprise you? Or the commonality of mental health issues they face in comparison to the general population?

No, not with knowing what I know now but I still don't think most people really consider the connection. I think generally people will just separate out two clinical conditions like you know type-one diabetes, that's a physical thing, and then mental health is seen completely separately and rarely talked about in the same way.

CK: Is there any advice you would give to someone that has a type 1 diabetic friend that is newly struggling with an eating disorder?

I would advise them to try and educate themselves as much as possible to understand what the conditions are and what they present as. Also to be really careful about not saying ignorant things that could actually really upset their friend, without meaning to. If you are trying to give advice or trying to give support just be a bit careful about that rather than saying things like 'oh for god's sake just do this or do that'. So yes I'd say just educate themselves as much as they can and as with any friend struggling with emotional issues, just be there and listen so they know you are there for them.

Education with regards to diabulimia and ED-DMT1 is just even more crucial in light of all the misinformation you can come across and unwillingly absorb from media and society. It can be quite easy to slip up and say things that are incorrect without meaning to and can be more damaging than helpful which is the last thing you want to do.

CK: Can you spot the signs of deliberate insulin omission? What would you tell a loved one to look out for if they started feeling this may be an issue?

Yes, I am told symptoms are largely that akin to those found at diagnosis of diabetes: increased urination, lethargy, drinking a lot, which suggest high blood glucose levels. Another huge element to watch out for is your friend eating normal or large amounts but not seeming to take insulin or utilize their pump.

Additionally, either a lack of or obsessional amount of blood testing and basically, some denial when it comes to the need to take care of their diabetes. I feel it is also really important to try to look out for a friend during nights out that may involve alcohol by actively making sure they check their blood glucose regularly.

CK: How does it feel to be in a position where you might see your friend in extreme physical danger with their eating disorder and diabetes?

Just well, helpless really and very frightened.

CK: What do you feel needs to be done to tackle treatment options for diabetes and eating disorders?

Health professionals need to be as standard, given information about diabetes and eating disorders. There must be more awareness within the general population which would reach health professional as well. So even if the health professional isn't fully trained, if they have heard and can flag the eating disorder they can then refer on as a matter of priority so that the patient can be given the care that they need. GP's are a key place where standard information need to be given, and then any kind of eating disorder specialist services as well. I think those are the two current priority areas.

I think that covers everything and has been very helpful and informative. We hope this interview will be of comfort to DWED content readers that are trying to support a struggling friend. Thank you very much for speaking to us today.