This article was initiated and funded by Sanofi and written by Dr Dawn Harper

Voices from Both Sides of the Stethoscope

A Type 1 Diabetes Misdiagnosis Story

Sometimes life has a way of teaching us lessons we never expected. My personal experience with diabetes has shown me how important it is to get the right diagnosis from the start – and why we need to know more about the different types of diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease where the body produces little to no insulin, requiring lifelong insulin treatment, while Type 2 is when the body doesn't use insulin properly (insulin resistance) or doesn't make enough, often linked to lifestyle, though both result in high blood sugar. Type 1 develops quickly, usually in younger people, whereas Type 2 develops slowly over time, often in adults, and can sometimes be prevented or put into remission through diet and exercise.

The Surprise Discovery About 15 years ago, while filming a TV show, I had some routine health checks done. One of the results completely surprised me – my blood sugar levels showed I was heading toward type 2 diabetes. This didn't make sense to me at the time because I was a healthy weight and didn't fit what I thought I knew about type 2 diabetes risk factors.

Even though my colleagues suggested I should look into it more, I put it off for several years. It wasn't until I was promoting health screenings on TV that I finally went for my own check-up. This time, my blood sugar levels had crossed the line – I officially had diabetes.

Starting Treatment My doctor and I assumed it was Type 2, so we started the typical treatment. But when I began monitoring my blood sugar at home, I was shocked by what I saw. Just eating a slice of bread made my glucose levels spike dangerously high – much higher than expected.

The Real Answer After doing some research online, I joined a study at Bristol University that tests adults for Type 1 diabetes. The results showed I actually had Type 1 diabetes, not Type 2.

This was my "aha!" moment. Looking back, I realised I'd been avoiding follow-up tests because deep down, the original diagnosis never felt right. My healthy weight and lifestyle just didn't match what I expected.

What I Learned I've since learned that Type 1 diabetes in adults is more common than many people realise. Getting the correct diagnosis from the beginning would have meant getting the right treatment straight away. The good news is that there are now better guidelines for doctors to use specific tests that can tell the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.

My experience taught me that we can't always rely on assumptions about age, weight, or lifestyle when it comes to diabetes. Proper testing is essential to make sure people get the right care from day one.

Want to find out more about Type 1 Diabetes or Early Detection Screening? Test your knowledge at Sanofi's dedicated T1D information site.

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