What is Type 1 Diabetes?

Alex Bickerton – Consultant in Diabetes & Endocrinology

Type one diabetes and type two diabetes are fairly different conditions, although some of the end results are quite similar. Type one diabetes is what's called an autoimmune condition. So autoimmune conditions are conditions where we make antibodies against our own tissues, antibodies or chemicals that we make in the blood all the time to fight infection. But some people make antibodies against their own tissues and organs. And in type one diabetes, that's people making antibodies against the insulin producing cells in the pancreas. The result of this is that people with type one diabetes always need to go on insulin almost immediately and remain on insulin lifelong.

Debbie Wake – Diabetes Consultant

Nobody knows for sure what triggers Type 1 diabetes. We know it can sometimes run in families but actually, genetics isn't a major risk factor. So that if you've got a mum or dad with diabetes, you still only have between about a 4% to 8% chance of developing the condition yourself. It seems very likely that certain common viruses may trigger Type 1 diabetes in some people. We certainly see peaks of Type 1 diabetes at certain times of the year when viruses are circulating more.

Chris Batchelor – Type 1 Patient

In 1972, it was diagnosed, I've had it 48 years and I was working as a farm manager, in Dorset. I was fairly thin at the time, but I lost weight very rapidly, had a raging thirst, all the classical symptoms.

Debbie Wake – Diabetes Consultant

As the glucose levels rise, the body tries to get rid of it in the urine and so people tend to start passing more urine and then can become very dehydrated and thirsty. Because the glucose can't reach the cells to give energy, then people often feel really tired and will often lose a lot of weight at the time of diagnosis because the body is trying to break down fat and muscle as an alternative energy source.