

Diabetes and technology

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A colleague recently asked me to write a blog for Diabetes Awareness Week. As a type 1, well controlled diabetic of 34 years, working for a company that manufactures and develops remote monitoring solutions it made sense, so I agreed.

As I started to research and think about what to write, I was surprised to learn that 1 in 15 people is now living with diabetes. More worryingly, Diabetes UK report that “4.3 million people are now living with a diagnosis of diabetes in the UK. Registration figures for 2021-22 are up by 148,951 from 2020-21, and more than 2.4 million people are at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the UK.”

Now that’s a lot of people – around 10% of the population. I challenge you to look around your workplace and yes, that’s right, around 1 in 10 of your colleagues could be diabetic!

“Further, around 13.6 million people in the UK are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes although unlike type 1, type 2 diabetes can sometimes be prevented. Research has shown that for some people, a combination of lifestyle changes can reduce their risk of type 2 diabetes by about 50%.”

Whilst there is no diabetes cure or golden bullet, I can categorically say that prevention is the best thing. Eating more healthily and losing weight (if needed) are two things that not only prevent diabetes but lead to a generally better lifestyle.

So I was then thinking about why I don’t know more about diabetes and what’s happening in that space. Perhaps I’m blindsided by an ‘I’m alright, I can cope’ attitude. I mean, I don’t really want to know about potential complications – why would I? I test my blood sugar 7-8 times a day, I attend my annual reviews, I have an ok(ish) diet, I like to think I exercise and I’m ok.

But would I like greater independence, less hypos and support in managing my condition? Of course the answer should be yes, but at the same time I don’t want ‘medical intervention’ or a regular telling off from my diabetic nurse or consultant if I’m not measuring and managing my blood sugar particularly well.

So it’s all about communication, right? Whilst doing my research, I read about advancements in technology - continuous glucose monitoring and using a mobile to record readings, insulin pumps that can administer insulin based on your measurements or even a ‘bionic pancreas’ that combines an insulin pump and automated dosing software. Perhaps I’m just in the Dark Ages of finger pricking and analogue testing or perhaps I just don’t like the idea of always wearing a sensor 24/7.

Through briefly looking at this, I’ve found out that diabetes technology has clearly moved on a lot since I last took time out to research it. Clinicians generally won’t bother me if I don’t want them to and remote patient monitoring is something I can access if I want it; knowing I can do this and call a healthcare team for help if needed is reassuring.

Using technology for managing diabetes isn’t for everyone and there are pros and cons, but everyone I’ve talked to, blogs I’ve read and video’s I’ve watched suggest it’s a good thing.

Perhaps it’s time I got out of the ark and gave it a go!