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## **Type 1 Diabetes - it takes a family to raise a diabetic child**

*Have you checked? Those are usually the first words of the day for parents who have children living with type 1 diabetes (T1D). That's because monitoring blood sugar levels regularly throughout the day, but especially before or after meals, is non-negotiable. Daily insulin injections are vital to keep your child healthy until the world finds a cure.*

Hearing the diagnosis for the first time can be overwhelming and will leave any parent and child with mixed emotions - it's unfair, it's exhausting, it's stressful, it's scary and it's tough to manage. Yet, there is nothing on earth that any parent could have done better, to prevent their child from living with type 1 diabetes. Unlike type 2 diabetes, it has nothing to do with diet or lifestyle – it is an auto-immune disease. It is estimated that there are now more than half a million children aged 14 and younger living with type 1 diabetes according to the 7<sup>th</sup> IDF Diabetes Atlas.

According to Dr Ntsiki Molefe-Osman, Diabetes Medical Advisor at Lilly South Africa, T1D is a disorder of metabolism caused by the body's immune system which attacks the cells in the pancreas that produce insulin. "Children are not born with it, rather it develops over time and there is usually a genetic predisposition. In children, T1D presents commonly at around 14 years of age and younger. This means that T1D is a lifelong disease, it is serious, and managing it needs to be done diligently as poor control of the condition today will have lifelong repercussions. When a child is diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, so is the entire family who all need to adapt to a new lifestyle."

"The importance of good glycaemic control can't be emphasized enough," says Dr Ntsiki Molefe-Osman. The basic 101 of managing and preventing the complications of T1D is careful daily management of blood glucose and sustaining tight glucose control as close to normal levels as possible."

"Diabetes is a progressive disease, which left unchecked will cause organ damage. This has significant health repercussions for later on in life – from kidney failure, heart failure, blindness, nerve damage (diabetic neuropathy) and as a result loss of limbs. What you do for your diabetic child today and the responsibilities you teach your teen in managing T1D, will influence the quality of life they can expect to live later in life," explains Dr Molefe-Osman.

### **Why do T1 Diabetics need insulin?**

People living with T1D do not produce any insulin at all, so it needs to be replaced with insulin injections. Insulin moves blood sugar into body tissues where it is used for energy. When there is no insulin, sugar builds up in the bloodstream. This is commonly referred to as high blood sugar, or hyperglycaemia – it is dangerous and has many side effects. Fortunately when the blood sugar is stabilised with insulin treatment, these symptoms go away.

### **It can be managed**



While a diabetes diagnosis for your child may come as a shock and will mean that lifestyle adjustments will have to be made, it is important to remember that with consistent control and the support of a healthcare provider, people living with Type 1 diabetes can live full, active lives.

### **Family support is vital**

Managing Type 1 Diabetes in your child takes a lot of courage and determination. Imagine the mountain that a child faces knowing that injections will be part of their daily routine. They may also worry that their condition will preclude them from enjoying all the things that other children get to experience, or lead to them being treated as 'different' in their school and peer environment. It all comes down to how you work together as family to support and guide your child in helping them see their daily treatment regime as a positive step towards a healthy and normal life, rather than as a punishment or burden. It is important to help your child believe wholeheartedly that with the right control and responsible approach, they can do whatever they want to do.

“Coping with and learning to manage a chronic illness like diabetes is a big job for a child or teen. It may also cause emotional and behavioral challenges and talking to a diabetes educator or psychologist can help immensely. It’s also important that family, friends, teachers and other people in your child’s network know of and understand the condition so they are alert to any symptoms or signs that their blood sugar is out of control and what to do to help them in an emergency situation,” adds Dr. Molefe-Osman.

It takes a huge amount of discipline on the part of the parent and child in managing the demanding diet, lifestyle and treatment regimen, so it’s essential to establish a routine that works for everyone concerned. Establishing good habits early, providing a support structure and ensuring that your child understands why good control is important are vital. It’s the difference between your child managing their diabetes, or diabetes managing them,” she concludes.

Lilly has spent 93 years striving to make life better for people living with diabetes around the world. Through research and collaboration, a broad and growing product portfolio and commitment to providing real solutions from medicines to support programs and access, Lilly works with healthcare providers to help people living with diabetes to overcome the daily challenges.

“It’s not easy, but ultimately the outcome of how well your child’s diabetes is managed depends on you and the systems you put in place to support them,” says Dr Molefe-Osman. “Use the resources available, join support groups and engage with your healthcare providers and diabetes educators for guidance and support as this will have marked impact on your family’s sense of well-being and quality of life.”

To learn more about Lilly, please visit at [www.lilly.co.za](http://www.lilly.co.za)

## Managing Type 1 Diabetes

Symptoms	Diagnosis	What parents should know
<p>Excessive thirst Excessive hunger Excessive urination (waking up more than 2x a night) Tiredness Weight loss Blurred vision</p> <p>Symptoms develop quickly over days to weeks</p> <p>Symptoms can worsen and child may need hospitalisation</p> <p>Worsening can mean drowsiness leading to loss of consciousness and coma, should the diabetes remain untreated</p>	<p>Checking sugar levels at the doctor</p> <p>Fasting blood glucose should be <b>less than 7mmol/L</b></p> <p>Random blood glucose should be <b>less than 11.1mmol/L</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Treatment</b></p> <p>Insulin therapy is the only treatment available, NO oral medication will work because people living with Type 1 diabetes do not produce any insulin</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ways to deliver insulin</b></p> <p>Injections throughout the day Insulin infusion via insulin pump</p>	<p>Take medications as prescribed</p> <p>Check sugar regularly at home, before or after meals</p> <p>Visit dietician to assist with appropriate eating plan</p> <p>Visit doctor regularly for follow up visits</p> <p>Don't despair, there are many support programs parents can join to help support their children</p>

### References

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- <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs310/en/>, Statistics SA.
- <http://www.diabetessa.org.za/children-and-teenagers-with-diabetes/>
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