



Type 1 diabetes self-management: a patient's experience of using CSII

When at the age of 24 I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes it was no surprise. I had lost my father to the condition when I was 11 years old and had unpleasant memories of his bouts of depression and his suffering during the later stages of his life.

Having been married for only six months at the time of my own diagnosis, my wife and I came to terms with the fact and decided that together we would learn how I could achieve and maintain good glycaemic control, enjoy a healthy lifestyle and look forward to our future and the prospect of impending parenthood.

Before CSII

Unfortunately, this did not go according to plan. Although always being very strict with my urine tests, and in later years blood tests, my injections and food intake, I very quickly became a 'brittle diabetic' as was the term at that time.

Over the next 19 years I was to be hospitalised every four or five months with extremely high blood sugars and, in fact, keto-acidosis threatened my life on three separate occasions. My wife learned how to inject me with glucagon, a service she needed to perform on a regular basis all far too often.

Our son's memory as a young child was of constant journeys by ambulance to St Bartholomew's Hospital at which I attended the diabetes clinic every three months, and subsequently became hospitalised on numerous occasions after presenting at A&E with hyperglycaemia. He remembers very well the blue lights and sirens, although

being so young he obviously didn't realise the implications of these rides. His life revolved around being picked up from school by his grandmother because his mum was always at the hospital visiting dad. The hospital seemed like his second home and from his earliest memories as a very young child, up until the age of 16, this is how life remained for him and for us.

My four injections increased dramatically over the years to between eight and 12 every day, and this restrictive regimen became almost intolerable. Although this method of multiple insulin delivery helped me to attain slightly better control, it was still far from an ideal situation. I continued to be prone to radical glycaemic fluctuations and my hypo awareness became impaired and debilitating, resulting in embarrassing situations and, unfortunately, the loss of friends.

Everything changed

Then, miraculously, 20 years ago everything changed, for all three of us. My consultant at Barts suggested I try an insulin infusion pump and almost overnight our lives were completely turned around. At this time, pumps were rarely heard of for home use but, having been used to a carbohydrate counting diet right from the beginning, the implementation of this wonderful piece of equipment was the answer to all our prayers – literally. Yes, we were even attending church on a regular basis to pray for some sort of normality in our lives! We have lived 19 years of hell!

Once up and running, the pump not only replaced my hypo unawareness with strong warning signs but dramatically decreased their intensity and frequency too. No longer were my blood sugars so elevated that I needed hospital care. We were able to monitor any rising levels and correct them immediately, and my wife's dual role as carer became redundant.

My life back

I can categorically state, without any hesitation, that had I not have been introduced to pumping 20 years ago, I would not be here to write this story today. I could definitely not have sustained the traumas of my earlier diabetic years as I was growing older and my quality of life would have been extremely poor. Pumping gave me my life back! It also offered a normal life to my son and wife, something for which I will always be grateful.

The first years were financially problematic because neither the pump nor the consumables were available on prescription, and to pay for all this we had to forgo holidays, going to the cinema, meals out and the usual treats of everyday life. However, further down the line we are extremely grateful that the NHS now supplies and pays for everything I need to continue pump therapy as my chosen method of control.

In our opinion it is a remarkable piece of equipment and one with which I will control my diabetes for the rest of my life.

Joseph Braeger, aged 63,
type 1 diabetes, diagnosed 1971