



# THE ABLE DIABETIC

## Able Guide No. 3

### **T1D vs T2D: The Differences That Matter**

*A plain English guide for anyone who wants to understand*

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#### **Why this guide exists**

If you have type 1 diabetes, you will have experienced this. Someone finds out and assumes they know what that means. They mention a relative who manages it with diet. They suggest cutting out sugar. They ask whether you brought it on yourself.

They are not being unkind. They are confusing two conditions that share a name yet are fundamentally different.

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#### **1. Two conditions. One confusing name.**

Type 1 and type 2 diabetes share the word “diabetes” because both involve blood glucose that is not properly controlled. They are, however, distinct and different.

They have different causes, different mechanisms, different treatments, and a very different day-to-day reality. Calling them both “diabetes” without qualification is a bit like calling a broken leg and a degenerative bone condition both “leg problems.” Accurate in the broadest sense. Not very useful.

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#### **2. What type 1 diabetes actually is**

Type 1 is an autoimmune condition. The immune system destroys the cells in the pancreas that produce insulin - completely and permanently. A person with T1D produces no insulin at all.

Without external insulin, delivered by injection or pump every single day, a person with T1D will die. That is not an exaggeration.

I was diagnosed at 21. Nothing I ate, nothing I did, nothing I could have done differently would have changed that. Pure bad luck.

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### 3. Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 is a metabolic condition in which the body either does not produce enough insulin or does not use it effectively. The pancreas is still functioning. The problem is that its insulin is insufficient or not properly recognised by the body's cells.

Type 2 is strongly associated with lifestyle factors and can often be managed through diet, exercise, and medication. It is serious. In some ways it's similar to type 1 but its causes and management are fundamentally different.

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### 4. The differences that matter in daily life

For T1D, insulin is not optional. There is no version of type 1 managed through diet alone. No remission. No going back.

Blood glucose moves constantly - affected by food, exercise, stress, illness, hormones, sleep, and more. Every meal involves a calculation. Every bout of exercise requires a plan. A continuous glucose monitor, an insulin pen or pump, alarms and data are part of daily life. A person with T1D is manually operating a system their body can no longer run itself.

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### 5. Why the confusion matters

When people confuse the two, the consequences are real. T1Ds are told to try cutting out sugar. Their need for insulin is not taken seriously. The complexity of what they manage daily goes unseen.

I have been in many settings, even medical, where someone asked whether T1D meant I was on insulin. The gap in general understanding is significant.

Getting this right changes how T1Ds are treated - at work, socially, and by the people closest to them.

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*Based on Sarah's lived experience of over 30 years with Type 1 diabetes, not medical advice. Always talk to your healthcare team.*

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### Want to understand more?

Sarah's memoir *Invisible Impacts* covers her first decade with type 1 diabetes - the real version, not the brave face.

Visit [www.theablediabetic.com](http://www.theablediabetic.com) or contact Sarah at [sarah@theablediabetic.com](mailto:sarah@theablediabetic.com)

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