



Tel 01908 630 433

23 February 2005

Martin Cullen  
Editor of Balance  
Diabetes UK  
10 Parkway  
London  
NW1 7AA

Dear Mr Cullen

**“Breaking Down the Resistance”**

I have a 6 year-old daughter with type-1 diabetes who developed the condition when she was three. I also represent a support group that has 35 children with type-1 diabetes. I was appalled and deeply insulted by this article that appeared in the March issue of Balance. So are other parents in our group.

Your article was about the EarlyBird study, which is seeking to confirm a ‘theory’ that type-1 and type-2 diabetes are the same. The article concludes that it is obese children that present with type-1 diabetes and implies that type-1 can be prevented with sensible eating. What on earth is this ‘theory’ based on? Is it actually a theory or merely a hypothesis? It bears no relation to our experience.

When the popular press talk about obesity in children, they usually throw in diabetes as a consequence to dramatise their point. This is misguided. They don’t understand the difference between type-1 and type-2 diabetes and have not read Diabetes UK website which says there are only 25 confirmed cases of children with type-2 diabetes in the whole country. This contrasts with the many 1000’s of children with type-1 diabetes.

We have put much energy into convincing the local media that type-1 and type-2 diabetes are different conditions. We also explain to them that children with type-1 diabetes are victims of an autoimmune condition that kills off the beta-cells of their pancreas – not caused by obesity. We had **thought** we had the support of Diabetes UK to fall back on. However, having read your article it feels like our national society has turned against us.

Look at the photo on our website [www.mkkidswithdiabetes.org](http://www.mkkidswithdiabetes.org). I challenge you to spot an obese child – you won’t because there aren’t any in our group. These children have enough to contend with – several injections and many blood tests

every day and frequent hypos and hypers. The last thing they need is other kids in the playground taunting them that they got diabetes because of what they ate.

We even have babies in our group with type-1 diabetes. Are you suggesting they have had too much milk and baby food? My daughter was three when she was diagnosed. It would be very difficult to find anyone that eats healthier than her. She loves fruit and vegetables and is not interested in junk food or sweets. She has always been underweight – on the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile for her weight. She is not alone. Most of the children we come across with type-1 diabetes are healthy and eat sensibly.

It would be tempting for you to come back and argue that this is just anecdotal evidence – and that we need a proper scientific study. However, our voluntary group provides a far more substantial statistical sample than the EarlyBird study. There are 35 type-1 diabetic children in our voluntary group. They represent about a third of the type-1 diabetic children in Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes has a population of about 300,000 people. Therefore we have a sample group of 100,000 people. The EarlyBird study of 300 'normal' children is such a small sample that it is unlikely to even include one type-1 diabetic child! Even if it does – what statistical evidence would that provide!!

I'm all in favour of research getting to the bottom of diabetes but please spend our money wisely on useful research that is robust and necessary.

Instead of fuelling the media misconception that type-1 diabetes is caused by eating junk food, it's time Diabetes UK pushed to have type-1 and type-2 diabetes to have different names. The stark reality for children with type-1 diabetes is that there is no cure and no identified lifestyle cause. Also, unlike type-2, it cannot be sorted out with tablets or reversed.

Most adults in the general population are wimps when it comes to needles or controlling their diets. In our experience you cannot help but admire children with type-1 diabetes. They put up with much suffering and just get on with it. They don't need you jumping to conclusions that their condition is their fault.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Hammond  
For MK Kids with Diabetes.

