



INSULIN AT
100

99 years, **7** months, **20** days ago

Leonard Thompson received the first successful injection of insulin.

[HOME](#)

[IF NOT NOW, WHEN?](#)

[DISCOVERY OF INSULIN](#)

[HISTORY OF DIABETES](#)

[TESTIMONIALS](#)

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[RESOURCES](#)

Testimonial

Sabine Hančl
Germany

The centenary of insulin has a very special meaning for me since Banting and Best used animal insulin to treat people with type 1 diabetes.

How long have you been living with diabetes?

I have been living with type 1 diabetes since 1963.

How were you diagnosed?

I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in May 1963. I was nine years old. My parents took me to the Children's hospital on a Sunday afternoon. I had been feeling unwell for some time. I had been drinking lots of water, losing weight, feeling increasingly tired and not eating much. They measured my blood glucose at the hospital and it was very high. Type 1 diabetes was a very rare condition in children at that time and so the hospital was unfamiliar with the appropriate therapy. They consulted with the distant University of Düsseldorf and immediately treated me with insulin.

For the first few days following my diagnosis, I was given salted water gruel and soup to eat and lots of mineral water and tea to drink. A laboratory assistant came to my bed several times a day to measure my blood glucose, carrying all

the required accessories on a tray. I was always particularly curious about the rounds, during which doctors patiently explained to me why I would always require insulin injections. Before I was discharged, my mother learned how to boil and assemble the glass syringe, inject me with insulin and calculate my diet. At that time, people with type 1 diabetes were treated with one daily fixed dose of long-acting insulin.

I eventually learnt to inject insulin and calculate my diet on my own, which gave me more freedom. I was particularly proud at being able to assemble the syringe, draw up the insulin and inject myself. We only received five needles per quarter in those days and so I sometimes had to file down parts of a needle that did not feel smooth.

What are the most important things that have supported your diabetes care?

Blood glucose self-monitoring – first with test strips, later with monitoring devices and now with sensors – has been very important for me. This has given me more freedom and allowed me to manage my diet more flexibly and intensify my insulin treatment to achieve blood glucose values close to the norm. However, most important of all is that animal insulin remains available as I have a life-threatening allergy to synthetic human insulin.

What has been your lowest point with diabetes?

In 2001, my life-threatening allergy to human insulin was ignored and I was mistakenly given two units of human insulin in a clinic. I went into severe anaphylactic shock with respiratory arrest. Since that day, I have a large tattoo on my right forearm with the allergy notice, which has proved very helpful.

Have you ever experienced issues accessing diabetes medicines, supplies and care?

Animal insulin is no longer available in Germany so it has become increasingly difficult for me to access it. I source animal insulin from the UK and recently experienced issues as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Thankfully, in January 2021 animal insulin was exempted from the list of medicines banned for export to the EU from the UK.

What does the centenary of insulin mean to you?

The centenary has a very special meaning for me since Banting and Best used animal insulin to treat people with type 1 diabetes. For many years, it was the only insulin

treatment option available. For me it will always remain the only option.

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