

# Experiences of the DAFNE structured education programme, and managing type 1 diabetes during Covid-19: A photovoice project

## Executive summary

### Why did we carry out this study?

Good self-management is an important part of diabetes care. Structured education programmes, like the Dose Adjustment for Normal Eating (DAFNE) programme, which teach self-management principles, can help support people living with type 1 diabetes. The DAFNE programme has been shown to improve health outcomes, and it is currently being rolled out to more hospitals across Ireland. Only a few studies have explored how people apply learning from the DAFNE programme in everyday life. None to date have explored DAFNE graduates' experiences of managing their illness during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### What was the aim of the study?

We wanted to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, and ways to enhance the programme in Ireland. We had two aims:

1. To explore experiences of the DAFNE programme among people with type 1 diabetes. This includes finding out how people apply their learning from the programme in everyday life.
2. To explore how graduates experienced the Covid-19 pandemic.

### What was involved?

Ten people with type 1 diabetes who had completed the DAFNE programme took part in this study. Participants took photographs over a 10-day period to capture their experience of the DAFNE programme and their experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants discussed their photographs and the stories behind them during an online interview with a member of the research team.

### What did we find?

Participants had attended a DAFNE programme between 2005 to 2022. Three attended the programme online during Covid-19 while seven attended the standard programme in-person pre-Covid-19 which takes place over 5 consecutive days or six weeks.

## Experiences of the DAFNE programme

Some participants felt the DAFNE programme gave them more flexibility and freedom in terms of engaging in exercise and making dietary choices. However, people had mixed views on applying the course learning (for example, carbohydrate counting) to everyday life. Some found it easy to apply the skills of carb counting while others felt it was time-consuming, stressful, and difficult. One participant felt the content and format of the DAFNE programme could be more tailored to suit people's needs and different lifestyles. A number of participants expressed frustration after experiencing a long delay waiting to access the DAFNE programme.

## Living with type 1 diabetes during the Covid-19 pandemic

Participants felt particularly vulnerable during Covid-19. The pandemic both disrupted some aspects of their diabetes self-management but supported other aspects. For example, during 'lockdown' some people felt they had more control over their diet. There were less opportunities to eat out in restaurants and there was less pressure to socialise. During the pandemic some participants attended medical appointments online. They felt more health services, including DAFNE, should be delivered in this way to shorten wait times and improve access.

## Supporting people living with type 1 diabetes

Some participants used their photographs to capture the need for other forms of support when living with type 1 diabetes. Some highlighted how technology helps them to manage their diabetes, for example, continuous glucose monitoring. Others discussed how important it is to be supported by others in their lives, including friends, family members, and colleagues. Some did not feel supported in their workplace and felt that they needed to hide their diabetes. Participants discussed the mental and physical toll of diabetes, and the risk of burnout as 'you don't get a holiday from it'.

