

LIFE STORY



Living on air

Broadcaster Ian Dempsey tells **Sheila O'Kelly** how his life was affected when he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes last year

The day after broadcaster Ian Dempsey was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes he woke up and couldn't remember the name of the condition. "For a minute I thought it was dyslexia," he jokes. "There were a lot of things it could have been because I felt so awful."

Ian was on a golfing holiday in Portugal last year and was feeling really ill. He had come out in dots all over his arms. He later found out that these dots were due to his

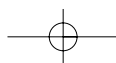
extremely high cholesterol level.

"I didn't know what these dots were. I was out playing golf in the heat but I wore long sleeves to cover up my elbows. People were looking at me as if to say 'your man's mad' which was a bit embarrassing. I put it down to the heat and being dehydrated – even though I was drinking gallons of water and going to the loo all the time."

A couple of days after he returned home Ian was still feeling rotten so

he went to see his GP. He took some blood tests and rang Ian the next day to say he needed to go into hospital immediately for tests. Ian spent the next nine days in Blackrock Clinic where he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

"The medical team said my levels were so high – my cholesterol was massively high – that they didn't think it was a lifestyle thing because you couldn't put that amount of stuff into yourself."



Ian Dempsey – his career so far

Ian Dempsey presents The Breakfast Show on Today FM from 7am to 9am every weekday morning. His career in broadcasting began in 1967 when at the age of six he made his first radio show in a friend's house! This incident proved crucial in deciding Ian's future career path and in 1978 he made his first transmission for Dublin pirate station Capitol Radio, followed by shows on ARD and Radio 257.

In March 1980 Ian joined RTE, presenting 'The Weekend Breakfast Show' and then shows like 'Poparama', 'The Hotline', 'Night Train' and 'The Great Givaway Show'. In 1986 he worked in television for the first time with the now infamous children's show 'Dempsey's Den' which also gave the alien twins Zig and Zag their break. He presented 'The Den' until the summer of 1990 as well as asking all the questions on the music quiz show 'Number One' and word quiz 'Talkabout'.

Also in the 1990s, Ian presented three successful seasons of 'The Beatbox', a two-hour music video show simultaneously broadcast on Network 2 and 2FM.

Ian started getting up early in 1988 when he began presenting the 2FM Breakfast Show and has been waking up the nation ever since having signed with Today FM to present Ian Dempsey's Breakfast Show on Friday 24, July 1998. His most recent accolade came in 2003 when he won the Meteor Award for Best Radio DJ.

Ian lives in Sutton with his wife Ger, two sons Shane and Evan and daughter Aislinn.

"I didn't know the first thing about diabetes. As the doctor said to me, it's a bit of a cliché but it's true: 'It's not a death sentence, it's a life sentence' – which is a pretty good way of putting it. There's no cure, there's no way around it so you're stuck with this. It was better that I was diagnosed than just going on the way I was and not realising something was up."

Ian said his whole family are now more conscious about living a healthy life and that from that point of view his diagnosis was a positive influence.

The Breakfast Show

Ian has been able to fit his diabetes regime in around his demanding job as presenter of the 7am-9am Breakfast Show on Today

FM and says the condition has not affected his work adversely.

Ian goes to bed at around 9pm and gets up at 5am but on Saturday mornings he stays in bed until 11. "If we go out on a Friday night I'd be quite tired and I don't really like doing those naps in the middle of the day. I get a bit confused, particularly because I go to bed so early, because when I wake up it's nearly time to go to bed again."

When he gets up in the morning, Ian has a small glass of grapefruit juice, two pieces of toast and black coffee. "I used to drink coffee with milk and sugar, but it doesn't bother me drinking it black – I'd find the other kind sickening now."

After breakfast he heads off from his home in Sutton into the Today

FM studios in Dublin's Abbey Street and settles in for his stint behind the microphone. At about half past nine Ian gets a wrap from nearby Marks & Spencer. "I've checked the ingredients on the package and it's very low and quite tasty."

He has coffee and something light when he goes home and has his main meal in the evening.

Changing diet

"I don't get ravenous even though I have cut down a lot on what I eat. Sometimes if I felt a bit tired I used to go and buy a bar of chocolate. I can't really do that any more, but it's grand. If I want to snack now I'll have something like an apple."

Ian's job does not allow for much physical activity: "You're basically looking at two computer screens for two hours non-stop."

Before Ian was diagnosed he had been losing weight but now he finds it is easy enough to put it on.

"I have to watch myself on the weight front. I was never a great sporting type but I do a bit of walking and I play golf; I have a bike and I do little bits and pieces here and there. But I don't have any system where I do stuff every single day.

"That's how we are in the 21st century. Nowadays if we can't find the remote control we are almost unwilling to get out of the chair. You could sit in one leather chair and everything would be delivered to you. I suppose we'll just have to educate ourselves a bit more.

"Diabetes is still fairly new to me but I'm kind of doing what I'm told. It was a bit of a shock I suppose, but there are worse things you could get."

Medication

Ian gives himself one insulin injection every day, takes Glucophage

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Ian Dempsey outside the Abbey Street studios in Dublin of Today FM:
 "It was better I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes than just going on the way I was and not realising something was up

tablets twice a day and takes Lipitor for his cholesterol.

"I test my sugar levels twice a day – first thing in the morning and before my main evening meal. That's the worst bit of it in a way; I don't like that dull thud you get when you put the lancet into your finger. Maybe I haven't got the technique for it yet.

Learning to inject

"I thought the injection would be really bad, but I manage to do that fine now. At first when I was shown by one of the nurses in the hospital I couldn't bring myself to do it – I think it's alien to you to stab yourself. The first time I had to do it, it was just so difficult, but then when I'd done it once it was simple."

When Ian first attended Professor Michael Cullen he was put on 30

units of insulin a day but this has now been reduced to 16. "I'm hoping that eventually I'll be able to get off that.

"Although my wife says she doesn't really want me to go below 16 units because she thinks it makes me a bit narky sometimes!"

When Ian eats at home he is very careful about his diet, but sometimes when he is out he might take a chance on something.

"The medical team told me there was nothing I could not eat even a Big Mac. But if I did have the very occasional hamburger I would need to balance it with something else. I think you should be allowed to have a few treats here and there and not be told to drink black tea and eat black toast for the rest of your life.

"I think I have a fair idea about

what's in what. I've got into the habit of looking at the different ingredients and I check my blood regularly to make sure it hasn't gone sky high.

Avoiding processed food

"I try to stay away from processed food to the best of my ability. And my wife, when she's buying stuff in the supermarket, will look at the sugar content and that type of thing. So from that point of view it benefits the whole family. It's all diet drinks now in the house – sugar-free drinks – you get used to that.

"When I was in Portugal this year my blood sugar once went up very high – about 10.5 and it's usually 5 or 6. I was playing golf and when the game was over I had a shandy. If I had been making it at home I would have used a diet soft drink. If I do get a high like that I analyse what I've eaten and trace it back. Then I take it easy for a little while and then I try to eat something low to mop it up.

"Normally after a couple of hours it's back. That scare in Portugal was the first in months – where I was saying 'oh my god, what's going on here?'"

Father also has diabetes

About six months before Ian was diagnosed, his father who is in his seventies was also diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

Ian and his wife Ger have three children, two sons Shane and Evan and a daughter Aislinn, and they have been advised to have them tested.

Ian has managed to keep his A1c (the long-term measure of blood glucose) below the recommended 7% since he was diagnosed.

"If I have to do it for the rest of my life, I'm happy enough to do that. It's not too difficult."