

The Thalidomide Trust

A Simple Timeline

- 1954 Thalidomide is created by Chemie Grünenthal, a West German pharmaceutical company.
- 1956 The first thalidomide-affected baby is born in Germany to a Grünenthal employee.
- 1958 In April, thalidomide is licensed for distribution in the UK, by Distillers Company Ltd., under the brand name Distaval. The sedative was promoted as a 'wonder drug' to treat a range of conditions including headaches, insomnia and morning sickness in pregnant women – adverts emphasised the drug's safety using phrases such as 'non-toxic' and 'no known toxicity'.
- 1961 A letter is published in the Lancet from an Australian doctor, William McBride, for the first time publically making the link between thalidomide and birth defects.
- 26 November the drug is formally withdrawn by Grünenthal in Germany. A few days later, Distillers, the UK distributor, follows suit.
- 1962 The Thalidomide Society is established in the UK by a group of parents of babies affected by thalidomide.
- 1968 In February, damages are awarded to 62 thalidomide-affected children born in the UK from Distillers – the result of an initial settlement in the High Court following a legal battle led by their families.
- Grünenthal is brought to trial in Germany charged with intent to commit bodily harm and involuntary manslaughter.
- 1970 The trial against Grünenthal is brought to a premature end by the German government stating that the trial was 'not in the public interest'.
- 1972 A Sunday Times-led campaign is launched in the UK to secure a substantial level of compensation for all thalidomide-affected children in the UK.
- 1973 Building on the 1968 settlement, a final settlement worth a total of £20 million is agreed by Distillers Company for 429 children affected by thalidomide in the UK. As part of the settlement the Thalidomide Trust is established to provide 'support and assistance' – including annual grants - to all thalidomide survivors.
- 2004 Following a campaign led by the Thalidomide Trust's National Advisory Council (NAC), in July the Government announces that compensation payments made to UK thalidomide survivors will be tax-free.
- 2005 Diageo – formed by a merger between Grand Metropolitan and Guinness (who took over Distillers in 1990) – agrees an increased financial settlement with the Thalidomide Trust.
- 2009 The UK Government agrees to provide a Health Grant to all thalidomide survivors in the UK to help meet the increased health needs caused by their Thalidomide damage, initially for a three year pilot period.
- 2012 The Health Departments in all four nations of the UK agree to pay the Health Grant for a ten year period until 2022.