

Diabetes Fact Sheet

Diabetes is a chronic condition in which the body does not produce or use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone our bodies use to convert sugar, starches and other food into the energy we need.

When we eat, the nutrients in our bodies are unlocked by the hormone insulin. The pancreas of a person with type 1 diabetes produces little or no insulin. Without enough insulin, the body's cells think they are starving, so the body makes more sugar. When the nutrients in a person's food are finally converted to sugar, his or her blood sugar levels are too high. Type 1 diabetes is managed through insulin therapy. People with type 1 diabetes are at risk for medical emergencies.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body becomes resistant to the effects of insulin or doesn't make enough insulin. As obesity rates in children continue to soar, type 2 diabetes is becoming more common in young people. Managing type 2 diabetes includes lifestyle changes such as making healthy food choices and getting regular physical activity. The energy and attention of children with type 2 diabetes is likely to be affected, but they are not likely to be in urgent situations in schools.

Diabetes is not contagious. Although there is no cure, diabetes can be managed.

Hypoglycemia

Hypoglycemia (low blood glucose) is the greatest risk to a student with diabetes. If left untreated, hypoglycemia leads to loss of consciousness, coma and death.

Early signs of hypoglycemia include:

- Trembling.
- Clammy skin.
- Anxiety or irritability.
- Sweating.
- Dizziness or lightheadedness.
- Heart palpitations.

Hypoglycemia is treated by providing a small amount of sugar-rich food for the student to eat or drink. Your student must always have immediate access to such snacks whether at home, at school, on a field trip or at a sporting event. In teens, advanced hypoglycemia can be mistaken for alcohol intoxication.

Advanced signs of hypoglycemia include:

- Lethargy.
- Confusion.
- Behavior changes.
- Poor coordination.
- Seizures.

A STUDENT EXPERIENCING HYPOGLYCEMIA SHOULD NEVER BE LEFT ALONE.

- FOLLOW YOUR STUDENT'S EMERGENCY CARE PLAN.
- CALL THE SCHOOL NURSE AND 911 IMMEDIATELY.

Individualized Health Plan and Emergency Care Plan

The licensed school nurse (LSN) will work with your student and the family to translate the physician's directives into an individualized healthcare plan (IHP). The IHP spells out the ways to meet your student's day-to-day needs, exceptions to the routine needs, urgent care, staff training and communication.

The emergency care plan (ECP) prescribes steps to take for early intervention in cases of hypoglycemia and hyperglycemia, as well as the use of glucagon in an emergency. It will include emergency contact information for the parent, physician and additional emergency contacts.

A school nurse needs to provide direct care or on-site oversight of care when a student's condition is fragile, unpredictable, new or changed and when the student is developmentally immature, emotionally insecure or in transition. Without professional staffing, the student's medical safety could be in jeopardy. If the LSN finds the student is stable, he or she may delegate daily healthcare tasks to unlicensed healthcare personnel (UAP), at the same time setting parameters for training, supervision and evaluation.

Educational Implications

Fluctuations in blood glucose can affect attention, focus, motor coordination, strength, endurance and behavior.

Students with diabetes may be absent from class for a variety of daily healthcare procedures including blood glucose monitoring, insulin administration, snacks to maintain blood glucose levels, frequent bathroom breaks and consulting/problem solving with the school nurse and parent. School attendance will also be affected by medical appointments and illness.

Some students with diabetes are depressed or angry about having a chronic condition. They may be anxious about the possibility of an emergency. Others are embarrassed at being singled out from peers. Students with diabetes are also at risk for being bullied.

- Adults need to know the symptoms of low and high blood sugar and take the appropriate action when necessary.
- Allow your student to test his or her blood sugar level and take necessary actions in response, such as administering insulin. If not yet able to do so, determine who will perform this vital task.
- A student experiencing hypoglycemia should never be left or sent anywhere alone.
- Allow your student to carry a water bottle and drink water throughout the day.
- Keep parent-approved foods readily available in the classroom, in remote areas of the school and during activities off school property and after school, such as field trips and sporting events.
- Allow your student to eat whenever and wherever necessary. Allow enough time to finish lunch.
- Beware of alternatives to food items that are sometimes used in classroom instruction, such as part of a lesson or as rewards for behavior.

Instructional Strategies

- Use recorded books to help focus on text.
- Give short and simple directions with examples.
- Repeat instructions as needed.
- Use materials or devices used to solve problems or organize responses.
- Use visual and graphic organizers.
- Allow the student to write directly on tests instead of on answer sheets.
- Monitor placement of student responses on answer sheet.
- Highlight key words in directions.
- Have the student repeat and explain directions to check for understanding.

- Use templates to organize written work.
- Use graph paper to keep numbers in proper columns.
- Seat your student in a location that will reduce distractions.
- Allow for multiple or frequent breaks.
- Cue student to begin working and stay on task.
- Limit reading periods.
- Schedule activities requiring more seat time during your student's most attentive time of the day.
- Schedule hands-on and physical activities during your student's least attentive time of the day.

Resources

[The American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

(847) 434-4000

<http://www.healthychildren.org>

[American Diabetes Association](#)

<http://www.diabetes.org>

[Mayo Clinic](#)

<http://www.mayoclinic.com>

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Diabetes Public Health Resource

<http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes>

[National Diabetes Education Program](#)

Helping the Student with Diabetes Succeed: A Guide for School Personnel

Tips for Teens with Diabetes: What is Diabetes?

<http://ndep.nih.gov/publications/>