

Human Resources
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Supporting Diabetes in the Workplace Guidance

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Introduction

When an employee has been diagnosed with diabetes, it is their decision as to whether they want to share their condition with their manager and work colleagues. For many people, this can be a life-changing health condition but being open about their health, will be beneficial for everyone as it helps us to provide any support they might need to enable them to return to work if they are absent, or continue in their employment with some adjustments in place.

The best way to get informed about diabetes and how it affects someone is to ask them. Diabetes affects every person differently and as they live with the condition every day, they will be able to let you know how you can best support them.

Guidance

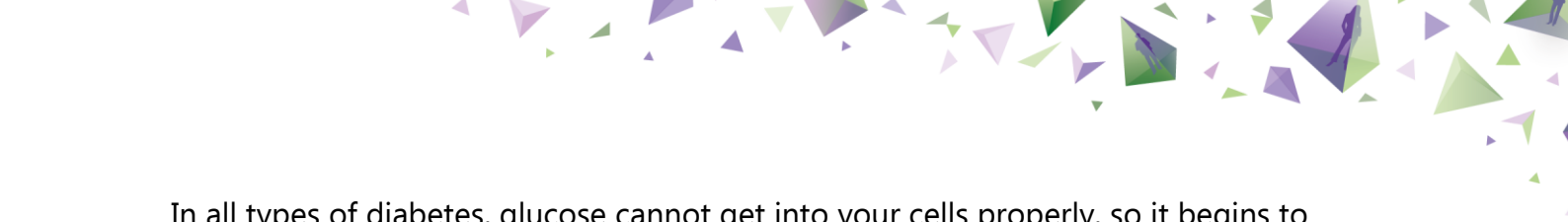
What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a complicated health condition where your blood glucose level is too high. It can happen when your body does not produce enough insulin, or does not produce any insulin at all, or when the insulin you do produce is not effective.

What causes diabetes?

We all need glucose for energy and when we eat, our bodies break down the carbohydrates that we eat or drink into glucose which is released into our bloodstream. A hormone, called insulin, is made by our pancreas and it is insulin that allows the glucose in our blood to enter our cells and fuel our bodies.

Your pancreas senses when glucose has entered your bloodstream and releases the right amount of insulin, so the glucose can get into your cells but if you have diabetes, this system does not work and you end up with too much glucose (sugar) in your blood.



In all types of diabetes, glucose cannot get into your cells properly, so it begins to build up in your blood. Too much glucose in your blood causes diabetes and contributes to a number of different related health problems.

Different types of diabetes

There are many different types of diabetes, although there are only 2 main types: Type 1 and Type 2 - both are quite different conditions, but they can both be equally serious.

Type 1

A person who has been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, is unable to make any insulin at all.

There is currently no cure for Type 1 Diabetes and there is nothing an employee can do to prevent it developing. A person is at a slightly higher risk of developing diabetes if their mother, father, brother or sister has it, however, the exact cause of Type 1 diabetes is not known.

Although Type 1 diabetes is often diagnosed in childhood it can develop at any age.

Type 2

A person with Type 2 diabetes produces insulin but they may not generate enough of it, or what they produce cannot work effectively. Type 2 is the most common type of diabetes.

A person with Type 2 diabetes may be able to significantly slow or even stop the progression of the condition through changes to diet and by increasing the amount of physical activity they do.

Other types of Diabetes

There are a number of other types of diabetes. They include gestational diabetes, which some women may go on to develop during pregnancy, type 3c, MODY and Latent Autoimmune Diabetes in Adults (LADA).

Symptoms of diabetes

The symptoms of diabetes can depend on the type of diabetes an employee has however, the most common symptoms of diabetes include:

- going to the toilet more frequently, especially at night
- being really thirsty all the time

- feeling very tired or more tired than usual
- losing weight without trying to
- genital itching or thrush
- cuts and wounds taking longer to heal
- blurred vision.

How is diabetes diagnosed?

Diabetes is diagnosed from a “fasting” blood test. If there are no obvious symptoms diabetes can go undiagnosed.

How do people manage diabetes in the workplace?

In most cases, employees should be able to manage their diabetes at work with the right support, but this may take careful planning and resourcefulness.

As they become more familiar with their own health, they will learn to recognise the physical effects of low/high blood sugar and take appropriate action before it makes them ill.

Blood Glucose test


An employee may check their blood glucose (blood sugar) levels by pricking their finger to ensure these remain within a target range. There are also devices that can automatically monitor blood glucose levels (for example sensors and watches). It is important for a diabetic to manage blood sugar levels to reduce the risk of serious health problems or long-term complications.

Medication

An employee may need to take insulin or other medication at specific times whilst at work to control their blood sugar levels. Medication may be taken orally or by injection/insulin pump). They may feel awkward or embarrassed about injecting in public and may need reassurance that their line manager understands what they are doing and that it is not a problem. It is helpful if they are helped to find somewhere appropriate to do this.

Healthcare appointments

An employee with diabetes may need to go to a number of healthcare appointments a year including an annual review with their healthcare team. These are an essential



part of managing diabetes and can help an employee manage their diabetes and also reduce the risk of serious complications. With the right treatment, controls and support, an employee can remain in full time employment and reduce the risk of taking time off.

Special paid leave

Special Paid leave can be requested to allow employees time off to attend hospital or healthcare appointments. This may include out-patient examination or appointments, tests or treatment. Special leave can be granted by the line manager on production of appointment evidence – see the [Special Leave Policy](#) for more information.

Managers must record all requests for special leave on MyView.

Emotional wellbeing and diabetes

It can be challenging when first diagnosed with diabetes and it is often tricky to live with. Stress and stressful situations at work can cause raised blood sugar levels and make it harder for someone to manage their diabetes. It can become a cycle of negative feelings which can leave someone feeling low and even lead to depression.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

The EAP offers free confidential support 24hrs/365 days. This is available to employees and their families. Managers can refer employees to support (with an employee's consent), or employees can self-refer. For more information, click here [Employee Assistance Programme](#)

Definitions

Type 1 Diabetes

If you have Type 1 diabetes, your blood sugar is too high because your body cannot make a hormone called insulin.

Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is diagnosed when the body becomes resistant to the normal effects of insulin and gradually loses the capacity to produce enough insulin in the pancreas to control blood sugar levels.

Prediabetes

Some people may have a blood sugar level that is higher than usual, but not high enough to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. This is called prediabetes, and means they are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes remission

Some people with type 2 diabetes are able to put their diabetes into remission. This means that their blood sugars return to a healthy level without the need to take any medication or other intervention.

Fasting blood test

A straightforward blood test to measure blood sugar after an overnight fast (not eating or drinking) to confirm a diagnosis of prediabetes, diabetes or gestational diabetes.

Gestational diabetes

Gestational diabetes can develop during pregnancy and normally affects women who have not been diagnosed with diabetes before. Gestational diabetes usually goes away again once the baby has been born.

Hypo

A “hypo” occurs when a person’s blood sugars are too low. Signs of a “hypo” include trembling, sweating, dizziness and a fast heartbeat.

Hyper

A “hyper” occurs when a person’s blood sugars are too high. Signs of a “hyper” include increased thirst, tiredness and lethargy, headaches, blurred vision and feeling sick.

Insulin

A hormone, called insulin, is made by our pancreas and it is insulin that allows the glucose in our blood to enter our cells and fuel our bodies.

Synthetic Insulin

Synthetic human insulin is identical in structure to human natural insulin. It is the main treatment for Type 1 diabetes – usually administered by injection or an insulin pump.

Roles & Responsibilities

Employee Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of each employee to take reasonable care to ensure their own health, safety and wellbeing and to take practical steps to look after themselves. Good diabetes management is essential for their overall health.

Ideally employees will discuss their diabetes health with their line manager to ensure they get the right support and enable them to continue in work.


An employee should:

- take care of their own health and safety and that of their colleagues or any other person they may come into contact with whilst at work
- highlight any concerns about their health to their line manager
- be aware of this guidance and any associated policies, particularly those which relate to [Attendance Management Policy & Guidance](#) and the [Special Leave Policy](#)
- attend regular healthcare reviews and an annual review
- provide medical evidence if they are absent from work because of their health
- consider any reasonable adjustments which may support them in continuing in work or returning to work
- consider lifestyle adjustments that may allow them to better manage their diabetes and remain in work
- check with their GP or pharmacist as to whether any prescription or over-the-counter medication may impair their ability to perform their duties
- if advised that medication may impact their ability to perform their duties, they should inform their line manager be aware of the resources available through the [Employee Assistance Programme](#)

Manager Responsibilities

If an employee tells you that they have diabetes, you have a legal obligation to support their health and wellbeing, including supporting them with their diabetes and making reasonable adjustments, so they can manage their diabetes at work and do their job. You should read this guidance alongside the [Attendance Management Policy & Guidance](#).

Managers should regularly enquire about their employees' wellbeing. Regular contact with an employee will demonstrate empathy and allow you to understand



how an employee is coping with their diabetes, spot any changes in mood or wellbeing and act quickly in providing appropriate levels of support to address any difficulties they are experiencing. Regular contact with all team members will provide opportunities to ensure they continue to feel valued and motivated.

If you manage an employee with diabetes, it is helpful to discuss whether they need any reasonable adjustments to be put in place. These might include flexibility around working hours, time off for appointments or any other adjustments at work which could be implemented to support them. Take the lead from them and be available to discuss any issues they might have.

When discussing an employee's diabetes, ask what symptoms you could look out for and what you should do if they ever need help treating a hypo. Most diabetics will have a supply of hypo treatments readily available – usually things like jellybeans, sugary drinks – which you may need to access in an emergency.

When an employee with diabetes gets an illness like a cold, flu or stomach bug, they may need to do extra checks, such as testing their blood sugar levels more often, ensuring they are not dehydrated and managing what and when they eat more carefully. A manager can support an employee through this by allowing them time to get better and providing flexible working options as they return to work. Stress can slow down their recovery even further and can affect their diabetes too, so think about emotional wellbeing too. You could signpost them to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) or refer them to Occupational Health for additional recommendations. An employee may also need extra support from their healthcare team at this time.

If an employee needs professional help, they should speak first to their doctor or a member of their healthcare team.

Managers should ensure:

- they have read this guidance and are able to apply any related policies to ensure inclusion, equality and fairness when supporting an employee with diabetes
- they arrange to meet with the employee once they become aware that diabetes has been diagnosed and discuss any supportive measures or adjustments which may be required
- take a flexible approach to any requests which will enable the employee to continue in work
- self-certificate and fit notes are obtained from the employee
- that every occasion of absence is recorded accurately in MyView

- they offer support & advice and signpost to [Employee Assistance Programme](#) and any other helpful information
- they maintain contact with the employee when absent
- they conduct a return to work meeting in a supportive and constructive manner
- they discuss any health and safety concerns or requirements of the job
- they discuss any concerns regularly as part of ERD process
- they refer employees to Occupational Health further advice is required
- they contact the HR Attendance Support Officer for further advice or clarification (hrattendancesupport@highland.gov.uk)
- they undertake risk assessment(s) especially for pregnancy related diabetes
- ensure the employee is aware they may be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative to any meeting during this process.

If you manage someone with diabetes, ask them if you can do anything to support them at work. They may say no, but diabetes can affect people in different ways over time. Make sure they know they can discuss their diabetes regularly in one-to-ones and appraisals if they want to.


For more information on implementing reasonable adjustments, click the [Attendance Management Policy & Guidance](#).

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments might include:

- allowing the employee to switch to different tasks on days their wellbeing is impacted
- temporary change to an employee's work pattern or shift
- part time working or reduced hours
- later start or earlier finishing times
- time off work for routine appointments and annual check-ups
- providing more frequent or regular breaks at set times, so an employee can keep on top of their blood glucose levels
- easy access to fresh drinking water at work
- providing a safe space to test blood glucose levels or inject insulin
- providing special equipment if they have eye problems.

Driving and Diabetes



People with diabetes are usually allowed to drive. However, there are additional rules that may apply depending on which medications they take and which driving licence they hold.

Pregnant women with Diabetes

Women with diabetes may need extra support and additional treatment to increase their chances of having a healthy baby. They must take extra care of their health at all stages of pregnancy. They may need extra care during pregnancy and they will have more appointments and extra scans.

Some women who don't have diabetes before pregnancy develop what is called gestational diabetes during pregnancy, which means they may also need extra care and more appointments. Gestational diabetes can develop during pregnancy and usually goes away not long after the baby is born, however, women have an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes in the future.

Is Diabetes a Disability?

Although a person with diabetes may not think of their condition as a disability, the law often decides that it is. If a person needs to take insulin or other medication for their diabetes, it is almost always covered by the [Equality Act 2010](#) because it is a long-term condition that can seriously affect someone's ability to do normal day-to-day things if it's not treated. As such their rights to treatment and protection from discrimination are protected by law.

Can we refuse to employ someone with Diabetes?

In most cases, diabetes will not stop someone doing their job however, there are a number of jobs roles where safety-critical work may mean that you would need to carefully assess someone's ability to carry out that job role may be impacted because of their diabetes or the way that it is treated. It is important that those conducting the assessment have both an understanding of the role and of diabetes and how it is currently managed. If you have any areas of concern you should consult with an HR Officer by emailing HR@highland.gov.uk

Additional Resources

Time off work for a diabetes education course is available for people with diabetes to help them understand and manage their condition. If you manage someone with diabetes, encourage them to go on an education course like [DAFNE for Type 1 diabetes](#) and [DESMOND for Type 2 diabetes](#).

It can make a big difference to how well someone with diabetes can manage their condition.

In addition, [DIABETES UK](#) have a very informative website all about diabetes, including:

- a link to [Work and diabetes](#)
- if you know nothing about diabetes have a look at [What is diabetes?](#)
- a guide on [Supporting an employee with diabetes at work](#)
- guidance on driving and driving licenses is available from the [Diabetes and driving information](#)
- guidance for [managing diabetes](#)
- guidance about [Stress and diabetes](#)
- if you live in Scotland and need support with your Diabetes, you can call **0141 212 8710** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)
- You can also chat to others online at the [diabetes support UK forum](#)

Quick Links

The Hyperlinks listed here will redirect you to the related guidance, letters, information, and relevant organisations mentioned in this policy.

HR Microsite	Click Here
Employee Assistance Programme	Click Here
Attendance Management Policy & Guidance	Click Here
The Equality Act 2010	Click Here
Special Leave Policy	Click Here
Reasonable Adjustment Passport Guidance	Click Here
Living With A Long Term Condition	Click Here



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