



Family and Friends Guide to Diabetes

If a member of your family or a friend has been diagnosed with diabetes there may be things that you can do to help and important information to be aware of in case of emergencies.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition where there is too much glucose (a type of sugar) in the blood because the body can't use it properly. Glucose is needed to produce energy and in normal health blood glucose levels (sometimes referred to as blood sugars) are regulated in the body by a hormone called insulin.

There are two main types of diabetes:

Type 1

The body doesn't produce any insulin at all, which is needed to help the body to use glucose. This is the least common type of diabetes and usually occurs in childhood, although it can occur in adulthood as well. No one knows what causes type 1, but it is not related to being overweight. Type 1 diabetes is treated by injecting insulin. A healthy diet and regular exercise are also important.

Type 2

The body doesn't produce enough insulin which is needed to help the body use glucose, or the insulin it does produce doesn't work properly (called insulin resistance). This is the most common type of diabetes and usually occurs in people aged over 40, although in South Asian people it can be as young as 25. Type 2 diabetes is linked to age, family history (so other members of the family have diabetes) and being overweight and less active. It may be managed by diet and exercise alone however tablets and/or insulin injections are often used.

Diabetes related health problems

People with diabetes often don't feel ill with their condition but if not managed well, it can lead to long term health issues such as sight problems (including blindness), heart attack, stroke, problems with feet and legs (which could result in amputation) and kidney problems.

The good news is the risks of these can be reduced through good control. Managing blood glucose levels (HbA1c), cholesterol and blood pressure can all help to reduce the risks of future health problems.

As someone who is either related to or a friend of the person with diabetes you can play a key role in supporting them to manage their condition well.



What can you do to help?

A listening ear

It's quite common for people with diabetes to experience different emotions, such as shock, anger, fear, low mood and denial especially when first diagnosed. Having someone to talk to can help the person to adjust to the news.

Provide support for self-management

As mentioned above having a healthy diet and being active can help manage both diabetes type 1 and 2. This can be difficult especially if your family member or friend has been less active and needs to change their current diet. The best way to achieve this is to make small changes that the person can stick to and having support from family and friends to make these changes and keep to them can make all the difference.

Healthy eating

No special diets are required for those with diabetes. If you do the shopping and/or cooking for the person with diabetes it's helpful to be aware of the types of foods and the amount that make up a healthy diet. This doesn't need to be complicated and is relevant to everyone not just those with diabetes.

By having healthy foods in the house and healthier meal options with appropriate portion sizes, it is easier for the person with diabetes to stick to and it's also good for you and the rest of the family.

In the "Diabetes and You. A more detailed guide to controlling diabetes" there is a lot of useful information on what a healthy diet consists of, portion size advice, suggestions on how to cook healthier and manage weight, so you may want to look at this. There are also some useful web sites for healthy eating ideas, tools and recipes listed in the help and advice section (page 10) of the "What am I going to do now?" booklet.

Increasing activity levels

Getting more active is also key to managing diabetes and as with healthy eating is good for all the family. If the person with diabetes that you're supporting needs to become more active, which can help with weight loss and weight management, is this something that you could do together or as a family or group of friends?

Getting more active doesn't have to mean joining a gym, there's lots of things to do to increase activity levels (e.g. more active housework and gardening such as vacuuming and mowing the lawn, walking, cycling or dancing). The recommended amount for everyone – not just those with diabetes is 30 minutes, 5 times per week of moderate exercise where you feel slightly out of breath (so breathing harder but still able to talk) and warmer.

In the "Diabetes and You. A more detailed guide to controlling diabetes" there's lots of useful information on increasing activity levels, so you may want to look at this.

Managing weight, eating healthier and increasing activity levels along with taking medication correctly are all key to managing diabetes well and reducing the risks of future health problems associated with diabetes.

Stopping smoking

Smoking with diabetes greatly increases the chance of having a heart attack, stroke and problems with blood supply to the legs.

Giving up smoking is the best way to reduce the risk but can be difficult. There are lots of ways to get support to give up smoking and these are listed on page 10 of the Help & Advice section in the “What am I going to do now?” booklet. As a family member or friend you can also support the person with diabetes to give up smoking and reduce their risk of future health problems.



Diabetes emergency help

Hypoglycaemia (hypo)

When blood sugars are too low a person with diabetes may suffer from Hypoglycaemia (hypo) which can cause sweating/going pale, trembling, racing heart, feeling light headed, nauseous, dizzy or confused.

If left untreated it can lead to unconsciousness.

If you are with someone who has diabetes it's helpful to know the signs of a hypo and what to do to help.

As soon as you notice the warning signs of a hypo take action immediately to prevent it becoming more severe.

If the person is still conscious and able to co-operate they need to increase their glucose levels quickly. They can do this by:

- Drinking a small glass (100-120mls) of Lucozade OR a larger glass (200mls) of a non-diet drink (e.g. coke or lemonade)
- Or take 5-6 glucose or dextrose tablets if you have these
- Eat some sugar, jam or honey
- Eat 5-6 jelly babies
- Drink 200mls fruit juice
- Chocolate bars should not be used as these don't act fast enough but are okay if there is nothing else available
- Try and keep the patient sitting still

If the symptoms do not improve in 5 minutes the treatment should be repeated.

To prevent blood glucose levels falling again the person should eat some longer acting carbohydrate such as:

- Half a sandwich
- A small bowl of cereal
- Fruit
- Biscuits and milk

If the person is semi or unconscious do not attempt to get them to drink anything, this can lead to choking. Call 999 immediately and if possible lay the person on their side in the recovery position, try to keep their airway (nose and mouth) clear.

Trying to rub jam/honey into the gums of someone having a hypo is no longer recommended.

Driving and hypos

If you are travelling with someone with diabetes who has a hypo whilst they are driving it's important for them to:

- Stop the car as soon as possible
- Switch off the engine, remove the keys from the ignition and move to the passenger seat if safe to do so
- Take some fast acting carbohydrate such as glucose tablets
- Eat some longer acting carbohydrate
- Wait at least 45 minutes after blood glucose levels have returned to normal before driving again

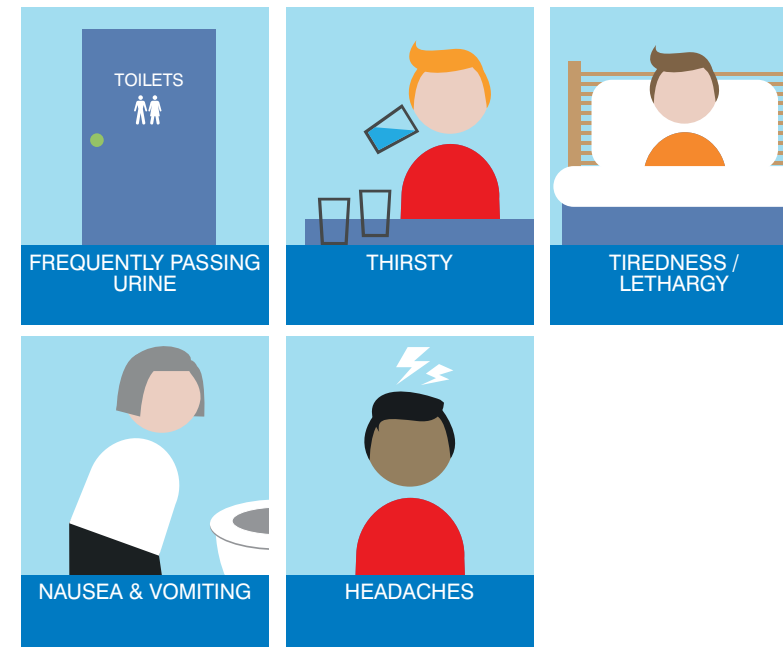
Hyperglycaemia (hyper)

Hyperglycaemia is when the blood glucose is raised too high (over 10mmols)

What causes a hyper?

- Missed medication
- Eating more carbohydrates than the body can cope with
- Stress
- Being unwell from an infection
- Over treating a hypo

What are the symptoms?



What to do in the event of a hyper

If blood glucose is high for a short time there's no need to take any action. But if the symptoms continue the person should:

- Drink plenty of non-sugary drinks
- Consider taking extra insulin, seek advice from the doctor or nurse
- Contact their doctor or nurse if they are vomiting or if the symptoms happen regularly

Diabetic Ketoacidosis

Consistently high blood glucose levels can lead to Diabetic Ketoacidosis which is a serious condition that if left untreated can be life threatening.

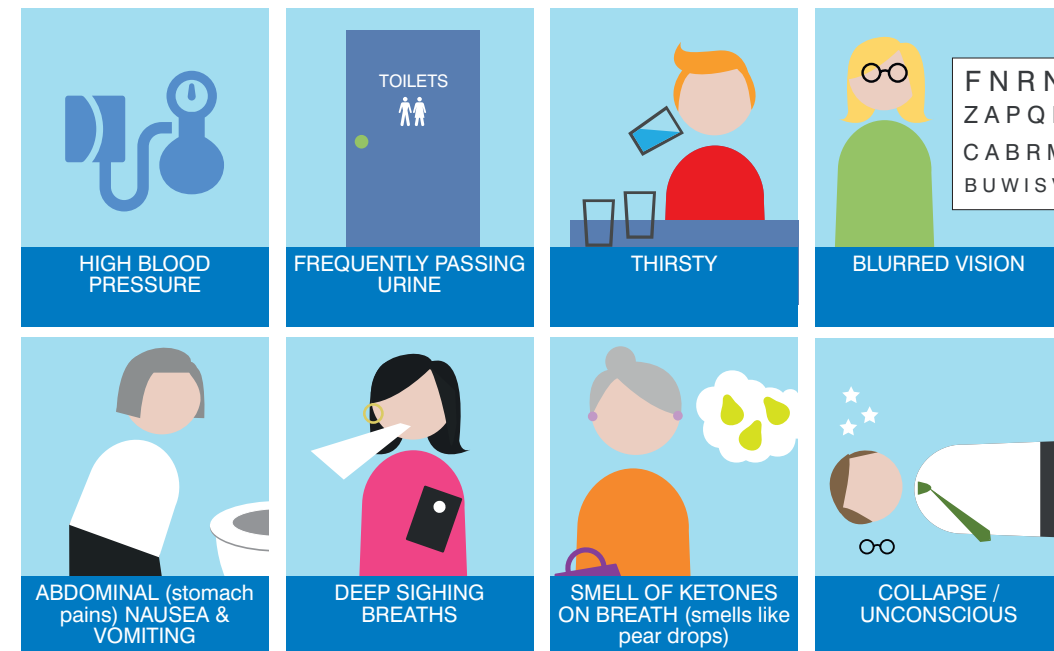
A severe lack of insulin means the body can't use glucose for energy and so breaks down other body tissue to use instead. This produces poisonous chemicals called Ketones which the body tries to flush out, so the person becomes very thirsty and passes more urine.

This is most common in type 1 diabetes but anyone who uses insulin can develop the condition and on rare occasions someone who manages their diabetes with diet or medication can develop it too.

When is diabetic ketoacidosis most likely?

- At diagnosis (if someone with type 1 hasn't been diagnosed until they are ill with Diabetic Ketoacidosis)
- When the person is ill
- If the person has not taken their insulin

What are the symptoms?



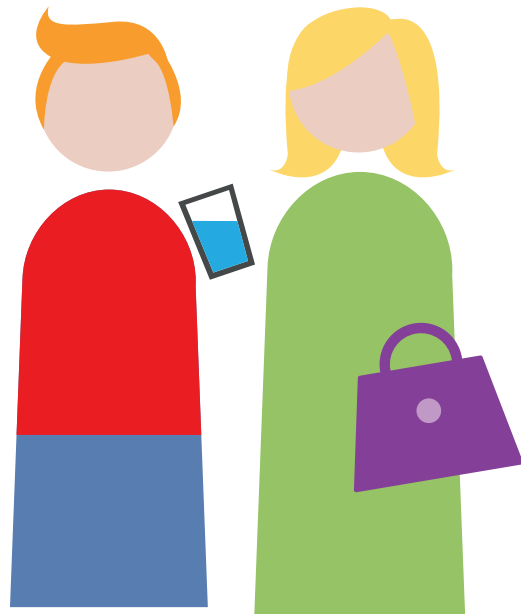
What should you do if you suspect Diabetic Ketoacidosis

- Contact the person's doctor or nurse straight away
- Get the person to drink plenty of unsweetened fluid only if conscious and able to swallow, do not attempt this if the patient is drowsy

Helping someone who is diabetic when they are ill

Illness and infection as well as other forms of stress can raise blood glucose levels. This is because as the body fights the infection it releases more glucose into the blood stream. People who don't have diabetes release more insulin to manage this but those with diabetes can't do this and so blood glucose levels rise. The increased glucose levels will mean the person passes more urine and will feel thirsty and this can lead to dehydration.

Severe dehydration can be serious for both type 1 and type 2 diabetes but by being prepared the worst of these effects can be avoided.

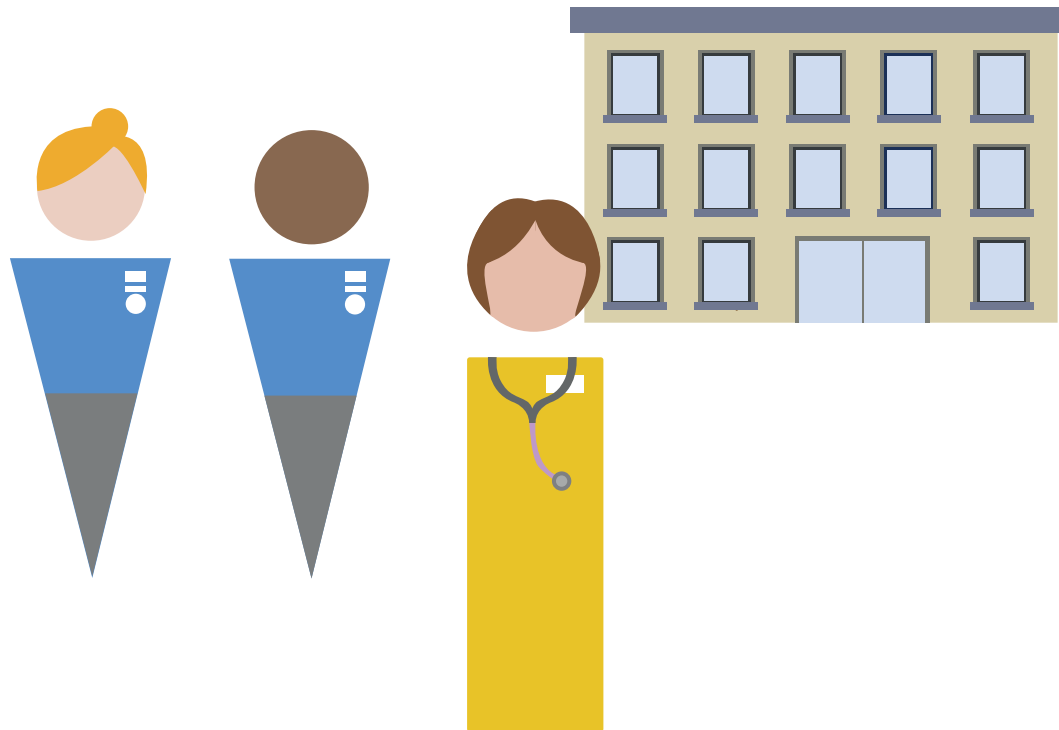


What can you do to help?

- When someone is ill it can be hard work for them to look after their diabetes so having you to assist them is really helpful
- If the person doesn't feel like eating, having some sugary drinks, glucose tablets or sweets such as jelly beans can provide some carbohydrate
- Keep the person's GP/practice nurse or diabetes team telephone number to hand so that they can be contacted if needed
- When someone is ill it's important that they still take their insulin or medication as this will help to lower their blood glucose levels. The dose may need to be altered and their doctor or nurse can be contacted about this
- If the person tests their blood this should be done more often, every 4 hours. If they don't test then you should be aware of the signs of hyperglycaemia and what to do. Do not leave the patient to sleep if they are due to test, if you cannot rouse them call 999
- It's best for the person to drink lots of unsweetened drinks to keep hydrated (at least a glass of fluid every hour) and if possible eat little and often
- If the person is vomiting or can't keep drinks down, contact their doctor or nurse straight away

What to do if the person needs to go to A&E

If the person with diabetes needs to go to A&E they may need to wait before they are seen. It's a good idea to take some snacks and make sure that the A&E staff are aware when you arrive that the person has diabetes and may need to eat something (usually people in A&E are advised not to eat in case they need surgery). If they do need to eat, make a member of staff in A&E aware first.



Going into hospital

There may be times when the person with diabetes needs to stay in hospital (long or short stay) whether for their diabetes or something else. Below are some things that may help for them to be prepared for the stay.

- If the person uses insulin it is best that they take their own with them as it may take some time for the hospital to arrange a supply of the one they use
- They should take their own equipment (e.g. pump or blood testing strips and monitor) as the hospital probably won't be able to supply these
- It is a good idea for the person to have a supply of biscuits, sugary drinks or glucose tablets in case they experience a hypo so they have these to hand



North East Lincolnshire CCG would like to thank the members of the patient group who through their own experiences of living with diabetes helped to shape the guide, members of Accord who reviewed the guide and local clinicians who provided the expertise.

If you or someone you know would like a copy of this document in any other language, large print format or braille please call 0300 3000 500 or email NELCCG.askus@nhs.net

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Clinical Commissioning Group***