

# Important Things to Know About Students with Diabetes

## About Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic disease that affects people of all ages, including school-age children. Diabetes is a condition in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone that converts sugar, starches, and other food into energy needed for daily life. The cause of diabetes continues to be a mystery, although both genetics and environmental factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play a role.

There are two types of diabetes:

- In type 1 diabetes, the pancreas does not produce any insulin; these students will always be on insulin.
- In type 2 diabetes, either the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or the body does not utilize insulin properly. Students with type 2 diabetes may be diet-controlled, take oral medication, or be on insulin. Insulin is required to metabolize carbohydrates (sugar).

The goals of diabetes management in school are to optimize the educational experience of the student; promote normal growth, development, and socialization; and prevent hypoglycemia, hyperglycemia, and long-term complications.

Ideally, a student with diabetes will be identified by the parents and/or guardians. However, sometimes school staff will learn that a student has diabetes from the student or other school staff. While some students with diabetes can manage their disease independently, others may require assistance during the day with administering medication, testing blood glucose (sugar), testing urine for ketones, or having snacks.

## Important Things to Know

- All school staff should be involved in keeping students with diabetes safe while at school.
- Each student with diabetes that requires assistance and/or care during the school day should bring physician/provider orders. From the orders, commonly called a medical management treatment plan, the school nurse, principal, family, and teachers are required to develop an individual health plan (IHP) specifically addressing the student's diabetes care during the school day.
- Know which students you teach have diabetes; become familiar with the IHP so that you will be able to recognize diabetic emergencies.
- Diabetic emergencies (mostly hypoglycemic episodes) must be handled swiftly. Low blood glucose can often be managed by having a snack. Extremely low blood glucose can be life-threatening and must be handled immediately. School nurses and unlicensed diabetes care assistants (UDCAs) are trained to handle diabetic emergencies.
- Students who can manage their own care during the school day cannot be required to go to the nurses' office. Students must be permitted to test their blood and/or have a snack anywhere, and at any time, on school grounds.
- A student with diabetes should have no barriers to participating in all academics or extracurricular activities.
- Students with diabetes should not be punished in any way or isolated for any reason.
- Information about students with diabetes is confidential and should only be shared with those who need to know.

## Unlicensed Diabetes Care Assistants (UDCAs)

Schools that have a full time nurse are required to have at least one UDCA to assist students in managing their diabetes. Schools that do not have a full time nurse are required to have 3 UDCAs to assist students with diabetes. There are specific training requirements for UDCAs. Information is available on the following link:

[www.texasdiabetescouncil.org](http://www.texasdiabetescouncil.org).

## Common Myths About Diabetes

Myth 1: People with diabetes cannot eat sweets or chocolates.

Fact: People who have diabetes can have sweets if they are eaten in moderation and are part of a healthy meal plan and exercise. Chocolate, for example, is no more “off limits” to people with diabetes than it is to people without diabetes.

Myth 2: Eating too much sugar causes diabetes.

Fact: Diabetes is caused by a combination of genetic and lifestyle factors, however, being overweight does increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. If you have a history of diabetes in your family, a healthy meal plan and regular exercise is recommended for decreasing your risk of developing diabetes.

Myth 3: People with diabetes should eat special diabetic foods.

Fact: A healthy meal plan for people with diabetes is the same as that for people without diabetes: low in fat (especially saturated and trans fat), moderate in salt and sugar, whole grain foods, vegetables, and fruit. Diabetic and “dietetic” versions of food offer no special benefit.

Myth 4: If you have diabetes, you shouldn't eat starchy foods like bread, potatoes, and pasta.

Fact: In moderation, starchy foods can be part of a healthy meal plan for people with diabetes.

Myth 5: People with diabetes are more likely to get colds and other illnesses.

Fact: People with diabetes are no more likely to get sick than people without diabetes. However, people with diabetes are advised to get flu shots because infections interfere with blood glucose management.

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services – <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/diabetes/tdcdata.shtm>  
American Diabetes Association - [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

Health and Safety, [Chapter 168, Care of Students with Diabetes](#)