

TYPE 1 DIABETES

Tips for College Life



Some practical advice on managing
your Type 1 Diabetes for new
3rd Level Students

Contents

Introduction	2
Before you go to 3rd Level college	3
Telling your new friends, colleagues, roommates that you have diabetes	4
Shopping and cooking for yourself	5
What do my friends need to know about Hypo's?	6
When feeling unwell	8
Alcohol with diabetes	9
Taking "drugs"	11
Sex and contraception	12
Exam pressures and preparation	13
University and college supports	13
Some important points	14
Useful websites	15

Introduction

Many of the experiences of young people with diabetes at university are covered in other publications but this booklet aims to highlight issues relating to diabetes control only.

This booklet is for people with Type 1 diabetes – an autoimmune condition requiring daily insulin injections. One of the most common acute health problems related to Type 1 diabetes is low blood glucose levels or as it is more commonly called a "hypo". When a "hypo" occurs, **immediate** action is required.



For many young people, starting 3rd Level means many familiar support structures (family, friends who've known them for years and are familiar with their diabetes, local diabetes team, home cooked meals, supervision by parents and teachers etc) may no longer be in place. These support structures provided students up to now with a vital margin of safety.

This booklet is written by students with the support of the diabetes nurses in Sligo Regional Hospital and Diabetes Ireland to help 3rd Level students live life to the full while retaining that safety margin.

Now you will be meeting many new friends and colleagues and many of these people may not be familiar with Type 1 diabetes. It would be a good time to inform them as to what Type 1 diabetes is, the reasons for insulin injections, regular testing and routine management of high and low blood sugars.

This booklet aims to help you fit your diabetes around your life and what you want to do at 3rd level college.

This booklet is dedicated to the memory of Darren Gaughan.

Before you go to 3rd Level College

Talk to your diabetes team about how you will manage and be responsible for your diabetes.

What clinic? Can I change my insulin times? What if I cannot get a full meal? What will I do if I get sick?

Where will I keep my insulin?

Have I got enough/double of everything?
Pens, needles, insulin, meter, sharps container, strips, sick day plan.

What about if my supplies are lost or taken? DPS card/LTI book.

Will people think I am "shooting up?"

Identification – medic alert items.

Do I need additional supplies?

Medicine Kit may include, ketone strips, approved over-the-counter medications (including sugar-free cough drops, etc), and a copy of sick-day plan. Hypo kit containing blood testing strips, meter, lancets, glucagon, glucose tablets, Lucozade, cereal bar, biscuits.

When should I get professional help?

If you vomit more than once in a four hour period or have persistent diarrhoea, have moderate or large ketones in the blood or urine, or if you have persistently high blood glucose level of greater than 16mmols/L despite using your sick day management.

Note: If in doubt - seek medical help!

What if I get sick?

Any illness will affect your blood glucose levels so remember to follow your sick day regime taking your normal insulin plus the additional quick acting insulin recommended on your sick day regime - see page 8. If your illness is not improving after 24 hours, seek an appointment with the university health clinic.

Ring your family, 3rd level health centre, diabetes team, if emergency ring 999 or from mobile 121.

College Life

- Do the paperwork and be prepared.
- Get your student card.
- Locate the campus map and spend a leisurely afternoon just walking around - you will be a step ahead when you are familiar with your surroundings.
- Introduce yourself to your future class mates and club members - also a good idea to find the student office, Health Centre and the DARE office to introduce yourself there and see what they can give you for free.

Smile - this card is with you for the next few years - stick your diabetes identification card to the back of your student card.

**THE ORIENTATION
PACK-REGISTRATION**

Telling your new friends/colleagues/roommates that you have diabetes

Who do I tell



It is embarrassing and a hassle but not something that you can avoid safely. Third level is not a solo run – you might even be surprised to find others also want to share their story.

There should be a discussion with the people you will be spending time with about the signs/dangers of hypoglycaemia, how to recognise it and what to do. See page 7.

Flat mates or someone close to you in the residence should be instructed in the event of what to do in case you become confused or very drowsy (unroutable). They should know when to call 112/999 and what to do when waiting for the arrival of medical personnel.



If you have a close relationship with someone (e.g. long-time friends), they may be willing to administer glucose gel/glucagon should you ever need it. In such a situation, the person needs to know how and when to use it and know where it is kept.

Keeping your diabetes to yourself can be very dangerous. You don't need to broadcast it to the world, but telling your close friends on campus will make life much easier.

It's always better to be open and honest.

Talking about your diabetes should be the same as talking about a romantic interest to new friends.

When do I tell



This is your decision but generally this is best done as the need arises, Coaches and club members (if exercise based sports involved) will probably need to know whereas lecturers probably do not unless you feel the need to be accommodated in some way e.g. testing during tutorial.

How do I tell



Base this on your personal feelings about diabetes.

Testing in lectures – can be done very discreetly but there is no reason to hide it – diabetes is part of who you are.

Is it something you can easily talk about? Do you need some written information as a way of opening a conversation?

In fact, doing the blood test in front of people you want to get to know better can be a good conversation starter. If other people cannot accept that this is necessary for you, do you want them as your friends!

Shopping/cooking for yourself

I can't cook? – everyone can cook but you may need some extra help
– Buy a simple cookbook, check online (YouTube is great) or get your siblings or parent to show you how to

- Chop vegetables
- Make an omelette
- Roast a chicken or joint of meat
- How to make a stir-fry, curry, spaghetti bolognaise
- The correct way to grill foods
- Cooking vegetables to desired taste
- Roast, boil and mash potatoes

All recipes can be divided into common ingredient sizes but remember to check the food 5 to 10 minutes earlier than indicated on recipe.

Cooking Tips

- Consider pre-cut vegetables - the salad bar of good supermarkets is an option for small quantities of prepared foods.
- Keep a cupboard of handy meal options - tins of beans, tinned fish, tomatoes, low salt soups, packets of crackers, crisp breads, oatcakes, fruit, wholegrain bread, porridge, wholegrain cereals, popcorn and rice.
- Always have an option in the fridge or freezer for making quick meals to fit in with classes/social life e.g. prepacked healthy options with the calorie content displayed on the food labels - low fat: less than 3g per 100g and low sugar: less than 5g per 100g.



Let friends know that snacks and Lucozade in the refrigerator are necessary for you and ask them not to help themselves without asking first.

What do my friends need to know about Hypo's?

Hypoglycaemia means low blood glucose and in a person who doesn't have diabetes, the levels never fall much below 3.5 mmol/L. In a person with Type 1 diabetes, the glucose levels will drop and continue dropping until they have some food in the form of carbohydrate. 100 mls of Lucozade is the best and quickest carbohydrate to give.

HYPOs can happen in minutes and need to be treated immediately.

REMEMBER you might find yourself eating less and rushing about more on campus, SO CONTINUE TO:

- 1. Be responsible.**
- 2. Carry quick acting carbs with you.**
- 3. Be aware of your hypo symptoms and treat as necessary.**

For your own safety, it is important that your key friends /flatmates would know how to recognise that you may have a low blood glucose, what they need to do to help you if you need it, and where you keep your stash of quick acting carbohydrate (so they also will know not to touch it).

Too much insulin injection or too much demand for the sugar (exercise, not enough or delayed food intake, alcohol) present in the body can lead to having a Hypo or low blood glucose.

Yes, too much alcohol can cause a dangerously low blood glucose.

'Hypo' is the name given to the symptoms which occur as the blood glucose levels fall.

HYPOGLYCAEMIA HAPPENS IN MINUTES.

When the blood glucose levels begin to fall the body usually triggers a number of 'warning symptoms' including:

- FEELING SWEATY OR COLD
- TREMBLING AND FEELING WEAK
- FEELING HUNGRY
- BLURRED VISION
- FEELING IRRITABLE UPSET OR ANGRY
- AN INABILITY TO CONCENTRATE
- LOOKING PALE
- FEELING DROWSY, DIFFICULTY IN WAKING UP

If nothing is done and the blood glucose level continues to fall the person will lose consciousness.

A person with diabetes should always have quick acting carbohydrate close by.

What can friends do?

It is always safer to treat as a "hypo" if unsure even if it is not.

If time permits, do a blood glucose check to confirm.

If fully conscious - give 15 grams of fast acting carbohydrate i.e. 150-200 mls sugary drink (not diet version) **or** 100 mls Lucozade **or** 5 glucose tablets **or** make warm drink adding 5 teaspoons of sugar.

When hypo (and fully conscious) the person with diabetes may seem reluctant to take treatment but you must ensure that they do.

If unconscious - lay person on their side to open their airway and call an ambulance. Do not put anything in their mouth.

ALWAYS CARRY IDENTIFICATION

ALWAYS HAVE GLUCOSE CLOSE BY



When feeling unwell

It might be a while since you learned your "SICK DAY RULES" so take the opportunity to update yourself now so you will be more aware of what to do if you get sick when you are away. If ever in doubt call your diabetes team.

When ill, check your blood glucose level every 2-4 hours and adjust your insulin/food intake accordingly. Use more short acting insulin if your blood glucose is high or you have ketones (how much depends on the sick day regime from your clinic).

You still need your long acting insulin even if you have increased your short acting one.

If you are unable to eat, have non-diet drinks (only time that your diabetes team will say these are allowed but in limited amounts).

Drink plenty of fluids (to wash out toxins and prevent dehydration).

Tell someone you know that you are feeling unwell and ask them to check on you in 2-4 hours.

Make sure your diabetes sick day regime is up to date and you have it in written form to refer to (keep a copy in the back of this booklet).

Call your college health centre and make appointment to visit in case underlying illness warrants medical attention.

GET HELP IF

- Your blood glucose is greater than 20 mmol/L for more than 12 hours
- You are vomiting or unable to keep down any fluids in the last 4 hours
- Your blood glucose levels are below 4mmols twice in last 4 hours
- Your temperature is above 101° C despite taking paracetamol or similar
- You have ketones greater than 1.6 mmol/L for more than 4 hours –

GET HELP IMMEDIATELY

HYPERGLYCEAMIA means high blood glucose and if undetected can lead to Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA), a potentially fatal condition. Avoid it by NEVER STOP TAKING INSULIN and follow your sick day regime when ill. **Hyperglycaemia happens over hours/days.**

Alcohol with diabetes

Alcohol is illegal for people under 18 years.



When you take insulin to manage your diabetes, drinking alcohol can cause a dangerous low blood glucose because your liver has to work to remove the alcohol from your blood instead of its main job to regulate your blood glucose.

Five minutes after consuming alcohol, the alcohol can be detected in a blood sample. It takes approximately two hours to break down the alcohol of one standard drink in your body.

- Alcohol first acts as a stimulant, and then it makes people feel relaxed and a bit sleepy.
- High doses of alcohol seriously affect judgment and coordination. Drinking alcohol may cause slurred speech, confusion, depression, short-term memory loss, and slow reaction times.
- Large volumes of alcohol drank in a short period of time may cause alcohol poisoning.

Therefore, follow these Guidelines to maintain a margin of safety:

1. If you are socialising and drinking alcohol, tell someone you have diabetes.
2. Do lots of blood glucose checks before, during, and after drinking alcohol – your blood glucose should be greater than 10 mmols/L before going to sleep and don't forget your long acting insulin if you normally take it at nighttimes.
3. Carry some form of ID – in your wallet or in the form of a bracelet/chain.



[Guidelines continued overleaf...]

4. Eat before you take alcohol — food slows down the absorption of alcohol into the blood stream. You may also need to have snack like toast or cereal before you go to bed if you had a few drinks.
5. Avoid binge drinking — more than five drinks in one sitting is “binge drinking” and not appropriate for anyone.
6. Be prepared — Always carry glucose tablets or another source of sugar.

Your liver has to work to remove the alcohol from your blood instead of its main job to regulate your blood sugar which can result in severe, longer than normal “hypo’s”.

7. Don’t mix alcohol and activity — physical activity [e.g. dancing, sports] and alcohol will increase your chances of having a low blood glucose.
8. Remember to ask friends to make sure you are up in the morning and ensure you have something to eat - the risk of a ‘Hypo’ continues into the next day. You may need to alter your quick acting insulin the day after to prevent “hypo’s”.

Glucagon injections will not work on a “hypo” when a lot of alcohol is in the blood stream.

The symptoms of too much alcohol and low blood glucose can be very similar, i.e. sleepiness, dizziness, and altered behaviour. You don't want others to mistakenly confuse a 'hypo' for drunkenness. Alcohol and diabetes is another reminder that it's always a good idea to wear diabetes identification or carry a card/info in your pocket, purse or wallet.



Taking “drugs”

**BANNED
SUBSTANCE**

All recreational drugs are illegal.

Adults try illegal drugs for many reasons including relaxation, curiosity, peer pressure or to feel part of a group or to change how they feel because they want to feel better or different in them self.

When you take illegal drugs into your body (often by swallowing, inhaling, or injecting them), drugs may either intensify or dull your senses, alter your sense of alertness, and sometimes decrease physical pain. All very similar to the effects of alcohol.

Effects can vary based on the differences in body size, shape, and chemistry and the type of drug taken – see http://kidshealth.org/teen/drug_alcohol/drugs.html.

Illegal drugs are dangerous for everyone and should not be used.

Illegal drugs affect your brain and impair your way of thinking.

Illegal drugs such as;

- Amphetamines and ecstasy cause dehydration increasing the risk of Diabetic Ketosis and suppress your appetite increasing the risk of “hypo’s”.
- Cannabis gives you the “munchies” resulting in constant snacking and over time can cause insulin resistance.
- Cocaine can cause heart problems and mood changes in the short-term and is very addictive.
- Steroids will increase your blood glucose and make control more difficult. Short term use may help build muscle mass but at the cost of future health problems.

For more
information please
see www.drugs.ie

Sex and Contraception

University life includes opportunities to make new friends and start new relationships. For some, this may include sexual relationships.

Along with discussing sexually transmitted infections (STI's), contraception, and what to do in the instance of unexpected pregnancy, people with diabetes are advised to tell their partners about their diabetes and how it affects their sex life. They also need to know how to watch for signs of a hypo.

Treat sex as you would any physical activity: test your blood glucose and have a snack before and be mindful of how your body feels while you are 'exercising'.

Keep carbohydrates at hand in case of a "hypo".

You are as much at risk of sexually transmitted infections as anyone else so use protection.

Females must also consider contraception – general guidelines apply regardless of diabetes control. Accidental pregnancy is not advised for anyone but a planned pregnancy is important for the baby and the mother with Type 1 diabetes.

Advice on sexual health is available free at all university health clinics.

For more information please see
www.thinkcontraception.ie



Exam Pressures/Preparation

Stressful situations cause a rise in blood glucose levels. Test more frequently and adjust your insulin. Make sure your college knows that your diabetes may require you to make an additional bathroom break during the exam. Start your study and preparation for each exam from the beginning of the semester - do not wait until the exam date is upon you. To avoid exam stress you should start your efforts from the first day of class. Make a timetable and plan your workload.



For more information please see
[www.mentalhealthireland.ie/
aboutus/272-exam-stress-tips.html](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/aboutus/272-exam-stress-tips.html)

or visit [www.spunout.ie/
life/article/exam-stress](http://www.spunout.ie/life/article/exam-stress)

University/College Supports

Most third level institutions have Disability Support Services – you are not disabled but have access to the service. The activities of these services vary from college to college, but they generally provide information, act as advocates and organise the provision of necessary supports for students. They often have an important role in creating a higher awareness of the needs of students among the teaching staff of the college, and generally making the college a more accessible place to students like you.

For more information please see
your college website under disability
supports (for educational purposes
diabetes is accepted as a disability).

Some Important Points

- Talk to your diabetes team as part of your planning for college life.
- Whatever you take for hypo's, buy it in bulk. That way, you won't think twice about sticking a handful into whatever bag or coat you grab. When you go to a party, make sure that someone you know will be there - someone who knows you have Type 1 diabetes and what to do in case of a hypo.
- If you don't have relatives or friends nearby, have your parents' network through their friends to find someone who can act as an emergency contact when needed.
- Make the decision to ALWAYS wear identification e.g. Medic Alert bracelet. There are many different styles available on www.diabetes.ie
- Photocopy insurance and prescription cards, in case your wallet is lost or stolen. Your parents should keep a copy. Keep another in your room.
- Have your sick day regime up to date and accessible in your room and your locker in college.
- Have two blood glucose meters, in case one malfunctions, and extra batteries.
- Make sure you have a safe system for discarding needles and strips.
- Check your diabetes supplies every three months. Be sure to check periodically and stock up before you start to run low. As a safeguard against running out of insulin, make sure your prescriptions are on file at a local pharmacy.
- Thank your roommate ahead of time for providing support. An occasional card or small gift works wonders!



Useful Websites

www.diabetes.ie

Diabetes Ireland is the national charity dedicated to helping people with diabetes and provides a range of services which include:



- Patient Support via its telephone lo-call helpline 1850 909 909 open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.
- Information via leaflets, information packs, magazines all downloadable from www.diabetes.ie.

www.accesscollege.ie/dare

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places on a reduced points basis to school leavers under 23 years old with disabilities (Type 1 diabetes as a lifelong condition qualifies under this definition) who have completed an Irish Leaving Certificate.



Disability Access Route To Education

www.ahead.ie

AHEAD, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.



www.runsweet.com

Advice for athletes with diabetes to help them be winners.



Are you participating in any event?

JOIN THE **TEAM** & FUNDRAISE FOR US!

Why not join hundreds of people who have fundraised for Diabetes Ireland under our **TEAM DIABETES** identity since we launched it by participating in an event such as a sponsored run, walk or even a parachute jump!



To join **TEAM DIABETES** or discuss other fundraising options email Gary Brady at gary.brady@diabetes.ie or call (01) 843 8118.

TEAM

Diabetes™
 **Ireland**



19 Northwood House,
Northwood Business Campus,
Santry, Dublin 9.
Tel: 1850 909 909

www.diabetes.ie