



Type 1 diabetes and exams

Type 1 diabetes:  
Make the grade 

# Using this tool

**We've designed this tool to help students with Type 1 diabetes, their families and schools plan and prepare for successful exams.**

While some information is provided about Type 1 diabetes, we've mainly focused on helping make sure diabetes doesn't get in the way of students being able to do their best in exams. This tool is most relevant to secondary school exams but can be used for exams in primary school too.

At the end of the tool, a printable card is included for the student to give to the invigilator on the day of the exam.

For more information about Type 1 diabetes go to  
**[www.diabetes.org.uk/schools](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/schools)**

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# Type 1 diabetes and school exams

**We want students with Type 1 diabetes to get the best exam results they possibly can. But with Type 1 diabetes there's a few things to think about and plan for so they can achieve their full potential and get the grades they deserve.**

High and low blood sugar\* levels can affect exam performance. Low blood sugar levels (known as hypos) can affect a student's mental agility, their ability to plan, make decisions, maintain attention and can affect the speed of their reactions. High blood sugar levels (known as hypers) can cause difficulty concentrating, thirst and mean someone needs to wee a lot. Blood sugar levels are also more likely to go up or down because of stress. So a student with any of these symptoms might not be able to do as well as they should in an exam through no fault of their own.

\*Children and families with Type 1 often talk about blood sugar levels as well as blood glucose levels. Either is fine, they mean the same thing.

# What the law says

## **Under equality laws, Type 1 diabetes can be classified as a disability.**

This means schools must make changes to the way things are normally done to make sure any student with a disability isn't placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled students. The legal term for these changes is 'reasonable adjustments'.

Under these laws, exam boards are required to make these reasonable adjustments if a student, who is disabled, would be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to someone who is not disabled and taking the same exam.

The contents of this tool are the sort of changes all exam boards and schools should be making for pupils with Type 1 diabetes.

In England, Scotland and Wales the rules around equality fall under the **Equality Act 2010**. In Northern Ireland it's the **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**.

While a student with Type 1 diabetes and their family might not consider themselves disabled, students with diabetes are covered by these laws.

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all have their own rules or guidance around supporting children with medical conditions like diabetes. You can find out what they are on our website [www.diabetes.org.uk/schools](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/schools)



# Help for students with Type 1 diabetes

Depending on the type of exam being taken, some arrangements are the responsibility of the school, and some are that of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ).

The JCQ is the organisation which represents the largest national awarding bodies offering qualifications in the UK, including GCSEs, A levels, Scottish Highers and vocational qualifications. For these types of exams, arrangements must be made in good time as the school might need to get agreement from the JCQ.

For more information about the JCQ go to [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk)

There are two main types of help which might be available for students with Type 1 diabetes:

**access arrangements** and **special considerations**.



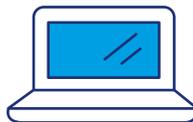
# Access arrangements

**Access arrangements are adjustments to standard exam arrangements.**

## **Here's some common adjustments for students with Type 1 diabetes:**

- Being allowed to take drinks and snacks into the exam to prevent or treat a hypo or hyper.
- Being allowed to take their blood sugar monitor and insulin treatment into an exam.
- Taking time out to treat a hypo, hyper or to go to the toilet. These are called supervised rest breaks where the clock is paused while the student treats themselves or uses the toilet. The clock restarts once they've recovered.

There's no maximum time set for supervised breaks, but if a student has another exam later the same day, this should be taken into account.



# Access arrangements checklist:

## Parent and student's responsibilities

- Tell your child's school about any access arrangements they'll need as soon as possible.**

This is to make sure that there's enough time to arrange the adjustments. So if you're expecting exams during the school year, talk to the school at the start of the school year.
- Don't assume the school will know what adjustments your child needs.** Think about how diabetes might affect your child's performance in an exam, and discuss particular adjustments you think they need with the member of staff responsible for arranging exams at your child's school or college. Think about checking blood sugar levels, eating or drinking to prevent or treat a hypo, being allowed time to recover from a hypo or go to the toilet.
- Make the point that these are the arrangements that are already (or should be) in place for your child during lessons.**
- Make sure the access arrangements are added to your child's individual healthcare plan (IHP).** The plan should be signed off by you, your child (if appropriate), the school and, ideally, your child's Paediatric Diabetes Specialist Nurse (PDSN).

# Access arrangements checklist:

## School's responsibilities

- Talk to your student and their family about what access arrangements are needed.** This might include checking blood sugar levels, eating or drinking to prevent or treat a hypo, allowing time to recover from a hypo or go to the toilet.
- Don't assume that all students with Type 1 diabetes will need the same access arrangements.**
- During the exam, make sure there will be enough invigilators or staff** to allow your student to leave the exam room and take a supervised break if necessary, eg to use the toilet or if blood sugars are low or high.
- Make sure your school has written evidence confirming the need for supervised breaks.**

# Special considerations

**Special considerations are when a student's marks can be upgraded after an exam.**

## Who qualifies?

For pupils with Type 1 diabetes the most likely reason to apply for special consideration is if low or high blood sugar affected their performance in an exam.

The problem doesn't have to have happened during the exam. For example it could be a hypo prior to the exam that left them less able to concentrate.

## Under special considerations, the exam board might consider:

- the amount of work the student managed to do in the exam
- any relevant coursework in the subject
- any previous exams the student has done in the subject.

Getting special consideration can be challenging, and evidence must be provided, for example, a written record or download of blood sugar levels.

To qualify for special consideration students have to be fully prepared and have covered the whole course.

The maximum an exam paper can be upgraded is **five per cent**, although the JCQ states that **three per cent** is more likely to be awarded for issues related to diabetes. How much an exam paper is upgraded depends on the timing, nature and extent of the illness.

# Special considerations checklist:

## Parent and student's responsibilities

- If your child has a hyper or hypo before the exam** (eg a night time hypo), and you think your child's performance will be affected, then you need to tell the school.  
**Your child will need to tell the invigilator if they have a hypo, hyper or other problem during the exam.**
- Ask your child's doctor or nurse to support your application.**
- Provide the relevant blood sugar readings to support your case.**
- Your child will also have to have done a certain amount of the total assessment needed in the subject.**
- The school will need to apply for special consideration on your child's behalf.** Talk to the examinations officer at your child's school as soon as possible.

# Special considerations checklist:

## School's responsibilities

- Discuss with the student and family the reasons for claiming special consideration.
- Record any hypos or hypers that might affect the student's performance in the appropriate place.
- Get the relevant blood sugar readings and medical support letter from the student and parent.
- Talk to any staff who were present during the exam in question.
- Make the application to the JCQ.



# Preparing for exams

## What students have to do

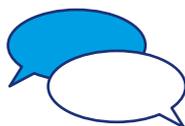
### 1 Managing blood sugar levels

Most people get stressed by exams. And for people with Type 1 stress often makes blood sugar levels rise. Studying for long hours can mean more snacking and less activity which can also make blood sugars rise and affect concentration. But then, worrying about exams can put you off eating, so levels can drop, causing hypos.

Prior to an exam, don't run your blood sugars high to avoid a hypo, as this can affect your concentration and might mean you need to wee more often. Both of these will affect how well you do in the exam.

**It is hard, but it's important to keep your blood sugar levels as close to normal as possible during exam time. This will help you concentrate properly and be able to do your best.**

Regular blood tests are vital so you can adjust your insulin, or the food you're eating, depending on your results. Talk to your doctor or nurse for more advice about managing your diabetes during exams.



## 2 Planning ahead

You and your parents need to arrange a meeting with your school to talk about what you'll need to make sure you can do your best during any exams. You might want to invite your PDSN as well. Your meeting should be well before your exams begin. If you know you've got exams coming up your meeting should be at the beginning of the school year.

### Things to talk about are:

- What you'll need to take into the exam room with you like blood checking equipment, insulin, hypo remedies, water etc.
- If you use a pump or Continuous Glucose Monitor (CGM), let school staff know, including how to manage any alarms, like putting the pump on vibrate mode during the exam.
- Where you would prefer to sit. Some students like to be at the front of the exam room, in easy view of the invigilator in case of a problem, some prefer to be at the back so they can test, treat a hypo or leave the room without disturbing others or drawing attention to themselves. Some prefer to take the exam outside of the main exam room as they don't want to draw attention to themselves if testing or treating a hypo or hyper.
- That you might need supervised rest breaks, to prevent or treat a hypo or hyper or to go to the toilet. During a supervised break, the clock must be paused and restarted when you've recovered. Talk to school staff about how this will work. The record card on [pages 22–23](#) will help you manage any supervised breaks.

This is not an exhaustive list. Everyone with Type 1 diabetes has individual needs so there might be different things to think about for you. Make sure that the arrangements you need during exams are written down in your individual healthcare plan.

### 3 On the day

#### **Here's some tips to help you make sure you can do your best on exam days:**

- Try to eat as normally as possible to give your brain plenty of energy to work on.
- Check your blood sugar level just before the exam, and if you need to, have an extra healthy snack or adjust your insulin dose.
- Keep a note of any blood checks you do. Most kits will record the date and time of checks so make sure the time and date are set correctly. If you need to make a case for special consideration after your exam, you'll need an accurate record of your blood tests, including the date and time. See [pages 22–23](#) for a template record card.
- Keep your kit, drinks and snacks in clear plastic bags not in black cases or coloured drinks bottles.
- Take some food into the exam with you in case you have a hypo. A sugary drink might be best as you can have that quickly and quietly.
- Tell the invigilator that you have Type 1 diabetes and that you might need to test your blood, treat a hypo or hyper or use the toilet. They should already know, but it's still important to let the exam room staff know at the start of each exam. The record card at the end of this tool can help with providing this information to the invigilator.
- If something's happened with your diabetes that might affect your concentration, like a hypo in the night, you must tell the invigilator before the exam starts.
- If you have a hypo in the exam, you must tell the invigilator.



# What schools need to do

## 1 Planning ahead

You'll need to meet with your student and their family to talk about the arrangements your school will need to put in place to make sure they can do their best in exams. To follow equality rules your school needs to stop children with Type 1 diabetes being put at a substantial disadvantage during exams. You might want to include the student's PDSN in the meeting.

You'll need to have the meeting in plenty of time – preferably at the beginning of the school year.

### **The type of adjustments for children with Type 1 are:**

- Allowing your student to bring their diabetes kit into the exam with them and to check their blood sugar levels whenever they need to.
- Letting your student bring hypo treatments into the exam. This might include a sugary drink, glucose tablets, sweets or a snack. They, their parent or PDSN will advise on the most suitable hypo treatment.
- Allowing your student to bring water into the exam. High blood sugar levels can cause excessive thirst.
- Allowing your student to bring their insulin injector pen or pump into the exam and to give extra insulin if their blood sugar levels are too high.
- Allowing a supervised rest break to prevent or treat a hypo or hyper or to go to the toilet. High blood glucose levels can make a student need to wee more. During a supervised rest break, the clock must be paused and restarted when the student has recovered. The template record card on [pages 22–23](#) can help manage supervised breaks.
- Making sure there will be enough invigilators in the exam room to accompany your student on a supervised break if one is needed.

- Allowing your student to take the exam wherever feels right for them. Some will sit close to the exam room staff, others at the back so they can treat themselves quietly while some will prefer to sit the exam outside of the main exam room.
- Making arrangements to make sure that the invigilators on the day know that there is a student with Type 1 diabetes sitting the exam and what adjustments to usual procedures have been agreed.
- Making sure the invigilators understand Type 1 diabetes and how it can affect a student in an exam.

This is not an exhaustive list, and each student's specific needs will vary and should be added to their IHP.

Some access arrangements will need approval from the JCQ and you can check this on their website [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk)

Supervised rest breaks do not need approval from the JCQ, but your school's special educational needs coordinator (known as a SENCO) or equivalent must provide written evidence confirming the need for supervised breaks to the JCQ if requested.



## 2 On the day

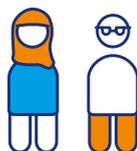
On the exam day itself, your school and the invigilators must make sure that the arrangements agreed and explained in the student's IHP are in place.

### **This might include:**

- Allowing your student to bring all the diabetes kit they need into their exam.
- Allowing the student rest, or supervised breaks, if necessary to prevent or treat a hypo or hyper or to go to the toilet.
- Making sure that the clock is paused if your student takes a supervised break and that it's not restarted until they have recovered.
- Making sure any hypos or hypers are recorded in the appropriate place. It will be needed if the student applies for special consideration after the exam.
- Making sure that there are enough invigilators to accommodate supervised rest breaks, and to accommodate extra time if breaks have been taken.
- Allowing the student to sit in the most appropriate place for their individual needs.
- Invigilators or exam staff being aware of the signs of a hypo, and alerting the student if they don't seem to realise that their blood sugar has dropped too low.

If a student has had a hypo or hyper before the exam that might affect their performance, they should let you know. Make sure this is recorded in the appropriate place, as it will be needed if the student applies for special consideration after the exam. The template record card at the end of this tool can help manage supervised breaks.

Most students taking exams will understandably be anxious, and students with Type 1 diabetes will have the added concern of whether their blood sugar levels will affect their performance. They may appreciate a quiet word before the exam to make sure they're OK with the arrangements, or at least to reassure them that you know about their diabetes. This needs to be handled sensitively, as some students don't want to stand out or be seen to be treated differently.



# Student record card

Student name .....

School name .....

Exam .....

Date .....

Exam time ..... until .....

I have diabetes so I may experience a hypo or hyper during the exam. My hypo and hyper signs are:

Hypo signs	Hyper signs
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

I might need to check my blood sugar levels, take insulin or have a snack or drink. I am allowed to:

**1 Have the following equipment and medication with me during the exam**

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**2 Have the following hypo treatments to manage my diabetes during the exam:**

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**3 Have supervised rest breaks with the clock paused to treat a hypo or hyper or to go to the toilet. The clock restarts when I've recovered.**

	Exam paused at	Exam resumed at	Total break time	Blood sugar reading
Break 1	.....	.....	.....	.....
Break 2	.....	.....	.....	.....
Break 3	.....	.....	.....	.....
Break 4	.....	.....	.....	.....

**Signed by**

Student

Parent or carer

Invigilator

.....  
 Date .....

.....  
 Date .....

.....  
 Date .....

If you'd like to speak to someone about diabetes, our specially trained counsellors on our **Helpline** will be able to answer your questions.

Call the Diabetes UK Helpline on **0345 123 2399\***  
Monday–Friday 9am–6pm  
or email **helpline@diabetes.org.uk**



@DiabetesUK



facebook.com/diabetesuk

For more information, go to  
**[www.diabetes.org.uk/schools](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/schools)**

\*Calls may be monitored for quality and training purposes.

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