

Work and diabetes

A guide for people with diabetes



DiABETES UK
KNOW DIABETES. FIGHT DIABETES.

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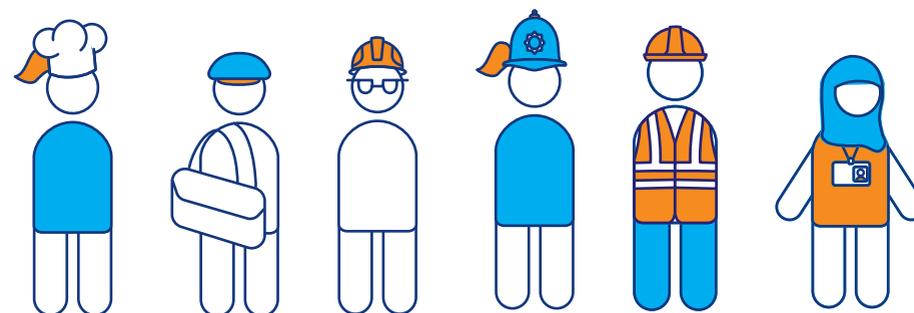
Getting a job

Applying for a job with diabetes

When you apply for a new job, your potential employer will want to find out if you fit the person specification and have the necessary skills and experience for the role. If you meet the needs of the job description, you should feel confident. Having diabetes doesn't mean you're less likely to get the job.

For most jobs, there's no legal obligation to tell an employer you have diabetes. **The Equality Act 2010 (page 9)** makes it unlawful for them to ask about your health before offering you work.

But talking about your diabetes from the start can show that you're positive about your condition. It can even be an opportunity to give examples of how resourceful and well organised you are.



In some cases, the organisation may ask if you have a **disability (page 9)**
For example:

- to find out if you need any support during the recruitment process
- to increase the representation of disabled people in the organisation
- if they have signed up to the 'Disability Confident' scheme, committing to offer disabled people an interview if they meet the minimum criteria for the role
- to monitor how many disabled people apply for jobs.

Telling them about your diabetes shouldn't affect your application.
Any information you give them must be kept separate and confidential.

Some professions do have special requirements because of the demands of the role. The employer will need to decide whether your diabetes poses any additional risk at work. If your condition could stop you carrying out your responsibilities or make you unsafe, think about **reasonable adjustments (page 11)** that would make it possible for you to do the job.

More info

Equality Act 2010
www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance

Employers that don't allow people with diabetes

We've campaigned successfully to stop employers banning people with diabetes from applying for roles. But we still have work to do.

Emergency services

Blanket bans have now been lifted for people with diabetes who use insulin. It's now up to your local service to decide – they will have their own rules. For example, some NHS Ambulance Trusts have rules about people with diabetes applying for jobs as ambulance crew. You should expect to be fairly assessed against these rules by someone who understands the role and how diabetes is managed.

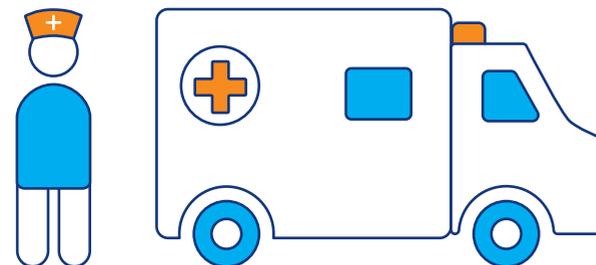
UK armed forces

They are exempt from the Equality Act and have a blanket ban on employing people with diabetes.

Being self-employed with diabetes

Self-employment can seem like the easier option when you have diabetes. But you shouldn't feel like it's your only choice. Weigh up your options carefully and decide what will work best for you.

Being self-employed gives you more flexibility to attend appointments. And working from home means you can treat your diabetes more easily in privacy, if you prefer this. But self-employed people don't get sick or holiday pay. And working alone can mean you lack the support of colleagues and the social benefits of teamwork.



Diabetes at work

Talking to your colleagues and manager about diabetes

The better your colleagues understand your diabetes, the easier it will be to get the support you need. A good first step can be to share our information on **Diabetes: the basics** and **Supporting people with diabetes in the workplace**.

Encourage your colleagues to ask you questions and give them the information they need to help – for example, what to do if you have a **hypo (page 8)**. Reassure them that you're in control of your condition and it's nothing to worry about.

If you didn't talk about your diabetes when you applied for the job, it's a good idea to tell your line manager about it sooner rather than later. They've already decided you're the best person for the job and will want you to be the best you can be at work. And if they don't know about your diabetes, they may not be able to give you the support you need.

More info

Diabetes: the basics

www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes-the-basics

Supporting people with diabetes in the workplace

www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/life-with-diabetes/employment/employers

Managing your diabetes at work

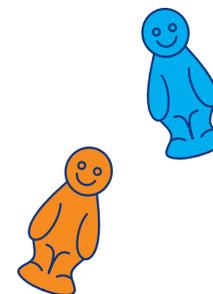
At work, it's more important than ever to be organised to manage your diabetes safely. Put reminders for blood glucose (sugar) checks and injections in your calendar. Look at what meetings you have at the start of the day so you can plan around them. And if you need to leave your workplace or travel, make sure you pack what you need.

Sticking to your usual work pattern at work can be tricky, especially in office environments where biscuits and cake are ever present. Try introducing fruit as an alternative to sweet treats. It's likely that there will be a few work colleagues who are glad of having a healthier option too. And prepare your lunch and snacks in advance so you don't end up eating unhealthily as a last resort.

Like anyone, your stress levels are likely to be higher at work than at home, which can make managing your diabetes more difficult. Make sure you take time out to relax throughout the day. And talk to your manager about flexible working options, which can make it easier to manage your diabetes and do your work.

“I've had to make some adjustments at work – regular breaks, keeping Jelly Babies nearby and letting my managers know about my condition. I've also told all my colleagues too, which is not something everyone does, but I feel safer knowing they know.”

Online forum member



Treating your diabetes at work

If you inject insulin and monitor your blood sugar levels, you will know these are things you need to do to keep safe. You shouldn't feel embarrassed about it. Explain to your colleagues what you're doing and don't feel the need to hide in the toilet.

If you're at risk of **hypos**, tell your colleagues how to spot the symptoms and how to treat one. This will make sure you get the right help and stop them panicking because they don't know what to do. Talk to your first-aider so they know how to act in an emergency.

If you have a hypo at work, talk to your colleagues afterwards. Explain why it might have happened, as although you don't always know why you have a hypo, some things make them more likely. Let them know it can happen if diabetes is treated with insulin or certain diabetes medication.



More info

Having a hypo
www.diabetes.org.uk/hypo

Your rights

Your rights at work

One in six working people with diabetes feel they've been discriminated against by their employer because of their diabetes. If you feel you've been mistreated, remember you have rights.

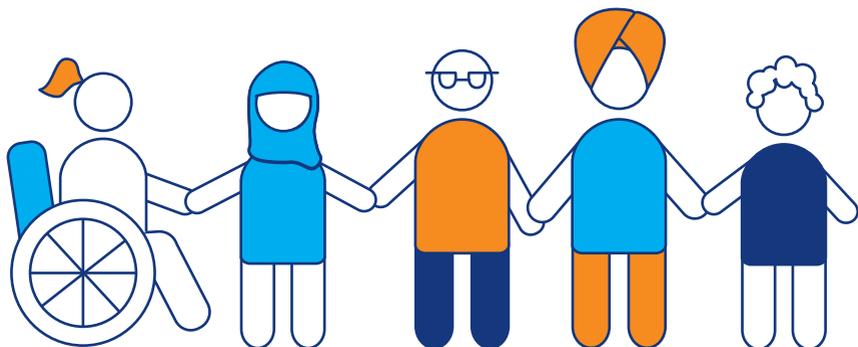
As someone living with diabetes in England, Scotland or Wales, your rights at work are set out in the **Equality Act 2010**. If you live in Northern Ireland, they are in the **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**.

Both these acts state the steps employers must follow in their treatment of employees and job seekers who have a disability. While you might not think of your diabetes as a disability, you should be protected by these acts.

The Equality Act 2010 describes a disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial long-term negative effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. If you take medication, the decision is based on how your impairment would affect you if you didn't take the medication. So to ask whether diabetes fits the description of disability, you must consider the effect of diabetes if it wasn't being treated.

The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** (EHRC) has guidance for employers and workers on the Equality Act which gives information on what the law means in practice and includes practical examples. For a more detailed description of the legislation and to see the Act itself, go to the Equality and Human Rights Commission website.

The **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** is where you should go for more information and advice about the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and how that applies to you in Northern Ireland.



Reasonable adjustments

Disability law is about levelling the playing field by making sure people with a disability have the same chance at a career as others. This means your employer may need to make reasonable adjustments so you can do your job.

For example, if you have diabetes and need to eat at set times to stay on top of your blood sugar levels, having your lunch break swapped around every day on a rota could make this difficult. A reasonable adjustment could be for your employer to allow you to have your lunch break at the same time every day.

You can get advice on reasonable adjustments from the Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) at your local **Jobcentre Plus** office, or the **Disability Employment Service** if you're in Northern Ireland.

Access to Work is a government programme to help keep people with long-term conditions and disabilities in work. You should speak to them if your employer can't or isn't willing to make reasonable adjustments so that you can carry on working.

There's more detail about employer obligations on the **Equality and Human Rights Commission** website.

More info

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/contents

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-guidance

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
www.equalityni.org

More info

Find your local Jobcentre Plus
www.find-your-nearest-jobcentre.dwp.gov.uk

Disability Employment Service
www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/finding-employment/help-find-employment

Access to Work
www.gov.uk/access-to-work



Muhammad was not allowed to pursue the sport he loved



Fiercely competitive from a young age, when boxer Muhammad Ali had his application for a professional licence rejected because of diabetes, he dealt a knockout blow to discrimination in sport.

“ I was driving to the gym for my final sparring session before my fight when I got a phone call from my boxing manager, who said, ‘Ali have they got something mixed up here? The board are saying you are diabetic and they can’t grant you a licence.’

I was devastated. I phoned my manager and family friend, Asad Shamim. He said, ‘don’t worry about it, keep training, keep your head down. We’re going to challenge the board.’

Asad got a solicitor and contacted Dr Ian Gallen, a consultant physician and endocrinologist with a specific interest in the management of diabetes in people who want to exercise or compete in sport.

I went to see Dr Gallen in February 2017, because Asad forced me to. He said, ‘look, it’s creating history. If you don’t want to do it for yourself, open doors for others.’

Asad got in touch with Diabetes UK, who wrote letters to the board saying I was the victim of discrimination and that I was fit to fight.

I wouldn’t be where I am today without the support of my family, my manager Asad Shamim, my manager Alex Matvienko and the support of Diabetes UK.

Asad made me realise that if you hide away, nobody can support you. Having my professional boxing licence rejected was a challenge to overcome, and we did it together – Asad, Dr Gallen and Diabetes UK.

After everything I’ve overcome, I’m proud of being diabetic. It’s created adversity for me and that has given me that extra bit of fight. ”

Time off work

Time off work for illness and check-ups

Everybody needs time off work when they're unwell or have a medical appointment – whether they have diabetes or not. Diabetes doesn't mean you're more likely to be ill. You're probably taking better care of your health than someone without the condition.

You'll need regular check-ups as part of your **15 Healthcare Essentials**. Make sure your line manager understands why these checks are necessary – don't apologise for them.

It's important to read your organisation's policy on time off for medical appointments and managing long-term conditions, because the rules vary between workplaces. Try to arrange multiple appointments in the same morning or afternoon if you can and give your manager plenty of notice.

Always seek medical attention when you're ill. Don't wait until it's urgent. And keep your employer up to date with what's happening so that they can support you in the best way possible.

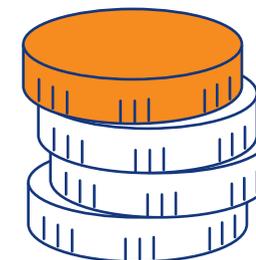


Or you may need time off to support someone with diabetes. Find out your employer's policy on care leave. Talk to your manager about the condition and how you're helping, so they understand how important it is.

Discuss options for flexible working if you need to give long-term support. And remember to look after your own emotional wellbeing – is there an employee assistance programme or in-house counsellor you can talk to?

“I work for a council and was penalised for taking time off for appointments that I had no control over the timing of. I got in touch with HR and now I can attend appointments without losing out financially.”

Online forum member



More info

15 Healthcare Essentials
www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/managing-your-diabetes/15-healthcare-essentials



Megan quit her job over lack of support for her diabetes

Megan, 27, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes 14 years ago. Last year Megan quit her job working as a management consultant due to lack of support and understanding from colleagues about the impact of diabetes on her day-to-day life.

“ I’ve experienced a lot of problems in the workplace due to staff not understanding my diabetes. In my previous job as a management consultant I was constantly undermined and told that my diabetes wasn’t that serious.

This included being told off for having medical appointments during the day, and being made to feel bad for talking about my diabetes, even though it’s really important for staff to know I have diabetes in case of an emergency.

I even had staff react negatively towards me after I ended up spending a night in hospital and taking a bit of time off work due to very high blood glucose levels.

The impact of all of this left me feeling frustrated, anxious and stressed, and in turn meant I struggled to manage my diabetes. I eventually decided that enough was enough, and I quit my job so I could spend some time taking care of myself.

There are a lot of misconceptions about diabetes. It’s often seen as a bit of a joke condition, but lack of understanding is another emotional stress, on top of having to manage the condition, that people with diabetes have to deal with every day. I think it’s really important people with diabetes get support to deal with the emotional stresses of living with the condition. ”

If you’re having problems at work about your diabetes, get in touch with us on 0345 123 2399.

Time off work for a diabetes education course

Going on a diabetes education course may mean time off work.

Explain to your line manager that the course will help you manage your diabetes and mean you're less likely to need time off in future. And you'll have a lower risk of developing diabetes related complications that could affect your work. Some course providers have materials you can pass on to your employer that explain the benefits.

Use our **template letter** to put your leave request in writing. You can ask a member of your healthcare team to write to your employer explaining why the course is important and how it can improve your health in the long term. You may have the right to go on a course under the **Equality Act**.

If taking time off isn't possible, or classroom-based learning isn't right for you, check with your healthcare team about evening, weekend or digital courses. You can also sign up to our **Learning Zone** for free educational support online that's tailored to your needs.

More information and support

Diabetes UK

We're fighting for a world where diabetes can do no harm. And as the UK's leading diabetes charity, it's our job to tackle the diabetes crisis. We provide information, advice and support to people with all types of diabetes so they can learn to live well with their condition. And we bring people together so they can learn from each other and get to grips with diabetes.

Visit our website www.diabetes.org.uk/work

If you live in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, call **0345 123 2399**

If you live in Scotland, call **0141 212 8710**

Open Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm.

Chat to others online in our support forum
www.diabetes.org.uk/forum

More info

Template letter

www.diabetes.org.uk/work

Diabetes education

www.diabetes.org.uk/education

Learning Zone

<https://learningzone.diabetes.org.uk>

These organisations specialise in areas of employment advice, legal services and disability rights.

Advice on employment rights

Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service help with employment relations issues and what employment rights legislation means in practice by supplying up-to-date information and independent advice.

www.acas.org.uk

0300 123 1100

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice offer free, confidential, impartial and independent advice. Advisers can help fill out forms, write letters and negotiate with third parties.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

England: **03444 111 444** Wales: **03444 77 20 20**

Legal advice

Civil Legal Advice (CLA)

The CLA can help you find legal advice and information from a range of sources, including Citizens Advice, law centres, independent advice centres and high street solicitors across England and Wales.

www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice

0345 3454 345

Labour Relations Agency (Northern Ireland only)

The Labour Relations Agency provides impartial and confidential employment advice. It can also provide conciliation, mediation and arbitration services.

www.lra.org.uk

03300 555 300

Law Centres Federation

Law centres provide free and independent specialist legal advice and representation to people who live or work in their catchment areas. They are unable to give advice directly to the public but their site will help you find law centres near you for free advice and representation.

www.lawcentres.org.uk

Scottish Association of Law Centres

The Scottish Association of Law Centres is the national body for a network of community based law centres covering Scotland only. They are unable to give advice directly to the public but their site will help you find law centres near you for free advice and representation.

0141 561 7266

The Law Society

To find a solicitor who specialises in certain areas of law you can look up the Find a Solicitor section on the Law Society's website.

England and Wales: www.lawsociety.org.uk

Scotland: www.lawscot.org.uk

Northern Ireland: www.lawsoc-ni.org.uk

HMC Courts and Tribunals Service

The employment tribunal service operates a public enquiry line to answer queries, provide information about tribunal publications and explain how the tribunal system works. They cannot give you legal advice, such as advising you on your claim.

www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/employment

England: **0300 123 1024** Scotland: **0300 790 6234**

Disability rights

Disability Information and Advice Line (DIAL UK)

Dial UK can provide details of local DIAL offices which can give help and advice. Some local offices can provide representation or help to prepare a case but this will depend on the local office's situation.

www.dialuk.info

0808 800 33 33

Disability Rights UK

Disability Rights UK work to create a society where everyone with experience of disability or health conditions can participate equally as full citizens.

www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Disability Law Service (DLS)

The Disability Law Service provides specialist legal advice and information to disabled people, their family and carers. They may also be able to represent at employment tribunals but whether this will be available depends on the merits of the case.

www.dls.org.uk

0207 791 9800

Equality

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The EHRC provides information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues, and has produced a series of guides on your rights to equality. The EHRC does not take on casework unless it is a test case.

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS)

The EASS provides information, advice and support on discrimination and human rights issues to individuals in England, Scotland and Wales, recognising the constitutional, legal, social and policy differences.

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

0808 800 0082

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an independent public body established to promote equality of opportunity and challenge discrimination. They provide free, confidential advice and assistance on discrimination and human rights issues.

www.equalityni.org

02890 500 600

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

The TUC has a range of guidance for trade unions on equality which is available on the TUC website.

www.tuc.org.uk

Health and safety at work

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

The Health and Safety Executive is the government agency responsible for protecting people against risks to health or safety arising out of work activities. They provide information and guidance on health and safety.

www.hse.gov.uk

Please note that the inclusion of named agencies does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Diabetes UK. Whilst every effort is made to ensure accuracy, Diabetes UK cannot be held responsible for errors or omissions. This information isn't professional advice. It is guidance only and the law can change from time to time. If in doubt, you should always take legal advice. Diabetes UK is unable to give legal advice.