

Top Tips

Talking to People with a Learning Disability About Diabetes

People with a learning disability want to be spoken to in a way they can understand. This guide provides some tips on how to talk to people with a learning disability about their diabetes.

1. Think about how you communicate as well as what you say

- Speak to the person directly, not just to their supporter or caregiver.
- Smile, speak slowly and clearly, facing the person. Pause to check understanding.
- Involve the supporter in the conversation rather than talking *about* the person with diabetes.
- Ask the person to help you understand if you have explained things properly by repeating back what they think the main points are ('teach-back' technique).



2. People need help understanding what diabetes is and what treatment is for

Most people with learning disability will have limited knowledge of diabetes. Complicated descriptions and too much information can cause confusion and anxiety.



- Not all medical terms are essential. Think about what is most important to understand.
- Blood glucose is not a term most people will use, 'sugar in the blood' is more commonly used - but check the person's understanding.
- Break down difficult information into smaller chunks and check back on understanding.
- Use Easy Read leaflets, visual aids and online videos to support conversations about diabetes and the body, but not to replace conversations.

3. Find out who is providing practical help and support



With the permission of the person with diabetes, supporters should be included in conversations where ever possible.

- Find out what the person with diabetes routinely does for themselves and who provides support, for example in attending health appointments or cooking.
- In some cases, the person's supporter or partner will also have a learning disability and will need help to understand their role.
- Provide Easy Read resources on diabetes management to both the supporter and the person with diabetes.

4. Understand people's current eating patterns before prescribing the "correct" one

Start the conversation with talking about what the person does now.

- Some people have set eating routines that need to be understood before they can be adapted. Talk about what they like/don't like before suggesting change.
- People may be upset at having to give up favourite foods. Talk about gradual change and explore 'swaps' – for example replacing full sugar drinks with diet drinks, or using sweetener instead of sugar in tea.
- Find out who shops and cooks and involve this person in conversations about change.

5. Make sure you discuss physical activity as well as diet

People with learning disability often have very low levels of activity and may not be aware of the importance of exercise in managing diabetes.

- Explain that being more active is as important for their health as diet.
- Discuss attending local exercise classes. Some are run for people with a learning disability.
- Some people feel more comfortable doing activities arranged specially for people with a learning disability, others are confident to use any facility: ask the person.



Remember, some people may need more support than mainstream services can provide alone. Contact your Community Learning Disability Team for advice.

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