

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease in which the body's ability to produce or respond to the hormone insulin is impaired. Insulin is required for sugar metabolism. Although there are 3 types of diabetes, this Tool Box Talk will focus on two:

- **Type 1** – a disease where the immune system wrongly attacks the pancreas and stops insulin production. It usually starts in childhood, it's genetic and can't be reversed.
- **Type 2** – occurs when the body cannot properly use the insulin that is produced or does not make enough insulin. Most commonly develops in adults, is considered lifestyle/age/genetics related, is progressive and may become more difficult to treat over time.

Both types of diabetes are manageable with proper diet, exercise and medication which may include insulin injections.

What is a Diabetic Incident?

Hypoglycemia = low blood sugar. Hypoglycemia is a deficiency of glucose in the bloodstream.

Hyperglycemia = high blood sugar. Hyperglycemia is an excess of glucose in the bloodstream.

Diabetes in the Workplace

It is not uncommon for people living with diabetes to conceal their disease from employers or colleagues to avoid negative reactions. Employers may have concerns about reliability or productivity. Colleagues may be unsure how to behave or react to the diabetic management techniques. A person who manages their diabetes does not pose any threat to their colleagues or the efficiency of their workplace.

Human Rights Legislation

According to the Canadian Diabetes Association, "human rights legislation specifies that an employer must accommodate an individual with diabetes up to the point of 'undue hardship'". Reasonable accommodation may simply mean altering a work schedule to include regular breaks for snacks, monitoring blood glucose and administering medication.

Symptoms

Low Blood Sugar:

Symptoms include dizziness, loss of coordination, irritability, confusion, headache, pale or clammy skin, hunger, weakness, and numbness or tingling around the lips and mouth. If untreated, a person may appear intoxicated, rapidly lose consciousness, and risk developing a severe condition known as a diabetic coma.

High Blood Sugar:

Tired and lack of concentration, severe thirst, frequent urination, blurred vision, and in severe cases abdominal pains, nausea and vomiting.

How to Help?

If the person is unconscious, place them in recovery position and call 911.

If conscious:

- Ask them if they need an ambulance.
- Have the person test their blood sugar first if possible. Try to give them some glucose gel or tablets, sugar packets or cubes mixed in a little bit of water, syrup, honey, lifesavers, or juice.
- Stay by their side to see if there are improvements within the first 10-15 minutes.

If no improvement:

- Immediately call 911 for an ambulance.
- Have them sit down in case they go unconscious because you don't want them to fall.

If you have diabetes, it is your right to keep it to yourself. A person's medical information is confidential. However, for safety reasons, you should consider disclosing this information to your immediate supervisor or a colleague so that there is someone who can assist if a diabetic incident occurs.

Check your Health and Safety protocols to ensure that there are instructions on what to do in a medical emergency and make sure to know who is trained in first aid on site.

For more information on diabetes visit the Canadian Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.ca