

# Hidden disabilities

## Diabetes

### Reasonable Adjustments

**DIABETES UK**  
KNOW DIABETES. FIGHT DIABETES.

estimates that 1.8 million people in the UK have diabetes and probably another million have it without realising.



Diabetes mellitus is a condition when the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body cannot use it properly. Insulin is the hormone which helps glucose correctly enter the cells of the body.

There are two main types of diabetes:

1

- Type 1 (also known as insulin dependent diabetes) occurs when the body is unable to produce any insulin, and usually appears before the age of 40.

2

- Type 2 (non-insulin dependent diabetes) occurs where the body cannot make enough insulin or use it properly. Type 2 tends to develop over the age of 40 and its symptoms are usually less severe.

Diabetes may be controlled by insulin tablets or by diet alone. Type 2 may not need insulin injections or tablets.



Without treatment, people with diabetes may well feel tired all the time and need constantly to pass urine.



This is caused by their high levels of blood glucose (technically known as “hyperglycaemia”). Hypoglycaemia means blood sugar levels which are too low. Triggers can be taking too much insulin, missing a meal, vigorous exercise or other factors.

People usually get warning symptoms before having a hypoglycaemic attack (or “hypo”).

The early effects are normally hunger, feeling shaky and starting to sweat.

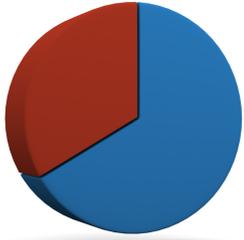


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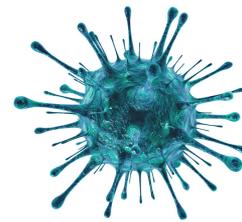
## Reasonable Adjustments



Research suggests that two thirds of people have no severe hypos at work in any one year.

Of the one third who do, the impact on the workplace is marginal, entailing minimal time off. However, people are regularly dismissed purely because of assumptions that there is a safety risk.

People with diabetes are also more prone to viruses and infections and these may take longer to clear, as well as make the diabetes harder to manage during that period.



Absences for apparently neutral reasons, therefore, may be disability related.



There are also various complications, such as eye disease, or foot or leg ulcers.



Someone with diabetes may or may not be disabled. There is no simple rule that, for example, type 1 diabetes is covered but type 2 diabetes is not.

It is important to remember that, even if the employee's diabetes does not yet have any substantial adverse effect, the member will still be covered if it is likely that it will in the future have a substantial adverse effect.

As with all forms of disability, where any substantial adverse effect is avoided by measures taken to treat the diabetes, the test is the effect without such treatment.

Where the person would have substantial adverse effects if they were not taking medicine or having insulin injections, they should be considered disabled.

But what if the person is controlling their diabetes by a restricted diet? There is a strong legal argument for saying that this also counts as a "measure" if it is on medical advice, and therefore the employee's health should be considered as it would be if they were eating a normal diet.

If a person can reasonably be expected to avoid certain behaviour which causes the adverse effect, they are not disabled e.g. if they just have to avoid sugary drinks.





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**Work Place Reasonable Adjustments: what you and your colleagues can Do And at your workplace**



**Always consult the individual.**



**A few jobs are barred to people on insulin and some others may be dangerous to someone with a history of severe hypos.**

**In general, however, a person should be perfectly able to work normally if appropriate adjustments are made. Depending on the individual, these could include:**

**1. Allowing food and drink at the workstation, to help regulate blood sugar.**

**2. Allowing the worker time away from their desk so they can test sugar levels or make an injection.**

**3. Timing between insulin injections and food ingestion can be crucial and the worker should be given flexibility as well as reliable breaks..**

**4. A suitable location for blood testing and injecting, and somewhere to dispose of lances and needles.**

**5. Avoiding variable shifts, particularly overnight, as these disrupt timing of meals and injections and provide irregular stress levels.**

**6. Making an allowance regarding sickness absence, including general viruses and infections.**

**Adjustments may also be necessary for related impairments, e.g. Visual Impairment, Heart Impairment, neuropathy / nerve damage (see RSI).**