

Diabetes Victoria works to support, empower and campaign for all Victorians affected by, or at risk of, diabetes.

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This information card was developed together with a group of adults with type 1 diabetes in 2009. We thank them for their valuable ideas and input.

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The National Diabetes Services Scheme is an initiative of the Australian Government administered with the assistance of Diabetes Australia. The NDSS Agent in Victoria is Diabetes Victoria.



Diabetes doesn't stop me from achieving at work and play

People with diabetes can do most of the things that anyone else can do; including driving, playing sports, travelling and having children. There are AFL footballers, Olympic swimmers, artists, mountain climbers and successful business people with type 1 diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is not just a childhood condition.

Most people with type 1 are diagnosed under the age of 30 years. However type 1 can occur at any age. Also remember that children with type 1 grow up and become adults with type 1.



Type 2 diabetes does not turn into type 1 diabetes

People with type 2 diabetes may also need to use insulin as their condition progresses. However, this does not mean they have type 1 diabetes.

Type 1 diabetes is not the same as type 2 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition that is not related to lifestyle or being overweight. It is known that you need to have certain genes to develop type 1 diabetes, but not everyone with these genes develops type 1 diabetes. It also needs to be triggered by something in the environment. 10–15% of all people with diabetes have type 1.



Type 2 diabetes can often be prevented or delayed through healthy eating and physical activity. People with type 2 may produce some insulin but not enough and/or their body may not use it properly. People with type 1 diabetes can't make any insulin at all.

There is no cure for type 1 diabetes... yet

But there is lots of research looking at the causes and prevention of type 1 diabetes. Researchers in Australia are studying environmental factors that could be causing type 1 diabetes. They are also trialling different medications to try to prevent its onset.

Please don't ask me

Repeatedly... are you okay?

(If I say I am okay I am... unless I look unwell)

Can you eat chocolate?

(Yes)

Does type 1 diabetes go away?

(No)

Can you catch diabetes?

(No, you can't)

Can I play with your insulin pump?

(Absolutely not!)

When you are old, will you still have type 1 diabetes?

(Yes, it doesn't retire)

Will you have to get your leg amputated?

(No, it's unlikely)

Should you be eating that?

(Yes, if I want to... but you shouldn't be asking!)

TYPE 1 ESSENTIALS

Common questions made easy



Diabetes

/daie'bitiz/, n.

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition. This means that the body's immune system destroys the cells in the pancreas which make insulin.

Insulin helps the body to move glucose (or sugar) from the bloodstream into cells for energy. Without insulin, blood glucose levels are too high. Type 1 diabetes often begins in childhood or early adulthood but can occur at any age.

I need insulin every day

People with type 1 diabetes do not make any of their own insulin. We cannot live without insulin so it must be injected, usually 2–4 times a day with a syringe or insulin pen, or given by an insulin pump.



I can eat what everyone else can eat

There is no such thing as a 'diabetic diet'. Just like everyone else I need a healthy, balanced diet. I can eat foods high in sugar and fat occasionally.

Sometimes I have a 'hypo'

Hypoglycaemia or 'hypo' is when the blood glucose (sugar) level is too low - less than 4.0mmol/L. This may happen if I have exercised more than usual, delayed or missed a meal or had too much insulin.



When I have a 'hypo' I may become shaky, sweaty, hungry, tired, angry or confused. I may also be affected by blurred vision. When this happens I need sugar straight away to quickly increase my blood glucose level.

Examples are six jelly beans or half a can of normal soft drink. I may need more if my blood glucose is still low.

After that I may need a snack, such as a piece of fruit or a sandwich, to make sure my blood glucose level does not drop again.

If I am unconscious, do not give me anything to eat or drink. **Call an ambulance on 000 straight away and tell them it is a 'diabetes emergency'.**



Having a 'hypo' doesn't mean I'm drunk or have a mental health condition

During a 'hypo' the brain is not getting enough glucose to keep working properly. This may cause me to act strangely, or be confused or moody, but it is just for a short time. I will return to my usual self after my blood glucose rises again.

Diabetes do's and don'ts

DON'T offer me unwelcome advice about food and exercise.

DO offer your encouragement and emotional support. Living with diabetes is sometimes stressful, scary and tiring.

Diabetes burnout

is common when living with type 1 diabetes. Distress, anxiety and depression are also common. Your emotional support will help more than advice about what to eat.

DO understand when I check my blood glucose levels and give myself insulin injections in public. These are things I have to do. Having to hide them makes living with type 1 more challenging than it already is.

DON'T count me out just because I have diabetes. I can do almost everything anyone else can.