

IT'S FUN BEING A KID

A guide for parents who want
to manage diabetes with peace of mind
together with their children



Lilly

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A GUIDE FOR PARENTS WHO WANT TO BRING THEIR CHILDREN WITH DIABETES BACK TO A NORMAL LIFE

Kids are kids; some of them turn out to have diabetes. When your child is diagnosed with diabetes, you may feel that nothing will be the same again. At first, things that most families and children take for granted - going to school, birthday parties, and sleepovers at friends' houses - may terrorise the families of children recently diagnosed with diabetes. It was easier to leave

the kids to do sport or dancing and go and pick them up an hour later. Eating out with the family used to mean less to worry about than dinner at home.

Children and teenagers with diabetes can have a rewarding, happy life once their families have realised that all it takes is a bit of extra organisation and preparation. This guide takes a number of common situations - such as taking your child back to school or sending him/her to a birthday party - and

will provide you with hints to help you and your child get back to life as normal feeling well prepared and confident.



On the back cover of this guide, you will find some helpful hints on how to prepare a bag or rucksack for your child containing everything needed to manage his/her diabetes.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Sending a child back to school after he/she has been diagnosed with diabetes can be both an exciting and a worrying experience. Most children cannot wait to be back with their friends and it is important you remind your child that he/she will be able to do everything he/she used to.

At the same time, he/she must be ready to answer classmates' questions about diabetes and must be able to monitor his/her glycaemia and administer insulin on his/her own. Learning how to manage diabetes outside the home is an important step for your child. With the help of conscientious friends and adults, school is the ideal place to start.

The most important thing is to establish a diabetes management programme for your child to follow at school and to make sure that this programme reduces the risk of your child feeling different or marginalised.

School staff – teachers, administration staff and all those who work at the school who may be responsible for your child – can be great allies in helping you and your child to create a normal scholastic routine.



WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

With the medical team

You may already have an excellent medical team of doctors, nurses, educators and the like. It is important you talk to them about all the aspects to be considered when sending your child back to school.

With your child

Does your child want the other children to know he/she has diabetes? Try and find out whether your child is comfortable when talking to others about diabetes and teach him/her how to answer classmates' questions or concerns.

If the other pupils are better informed, part of the strangeness and mystery that surrounds the situation will disappear. It might be useful to encourage your child to practise talking about diabetes in class, to help others understand his/her condition and, most importantly, to show that he/she hasn't changed despite having diabetes!

Make sure your child knows who to turn to for help – teachers or other members of school staff.

With the school

It is essential that, before your child goes back to school, you talk to the people who will be responsible for him/her during school time and any extracurricular activities. Teachers, coaches, school bus drivers, canteen and administrative staff, particularly the head teacher, should be informed of his/her treatment.

What to talk about

- To what extent your child is able to monitor his/her glycaemia and administer the insulin he/she needs, or to what extent he/she needs help and who to turn to: this depends greatly on the age of your child and how independent he/she is.

- Arrange for your child to have all the food and snacks needed to keep glycaemia in the correct range – you will be responsible for providing these foods, but ask whether they can be kept at school or whether the child has to take them in on a daily basis and where they can be kept.
- Identify a place in which your child can test his/her glycaemia and administer insulin, a place providing all the privacy needed.
- Recognise the symptoms of hypoglycaemia and know how to treat it, including how and when to perform emergency treatment in the event of severe hypoglycaemia. Evaluate the need to provide teachers and school staff with a document describing the symptoms of hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia.
- Establish a programme for school outings and events that take place off the premises, such as sports fixtures.
- How diabetes can affect schoolwork.
- Create a climate in the class in which the child's condition is understood and in which he/she feels free to do everything necessary to manage his/her diabetes - to say when he/she needs something and go to the toilet more often.
- Access to the toilet and water: Because of his/her diabetes, your child may get thirsty and need to use the toilet more often than other kids.



EXERCISE AND PLAYTIME

Regular exercise is part of any healthy lifestyle and is essential to the physical development of all children.

Exercise can mean team or individual sports, but also dancing, going for a walk and even playing in the playground.

Exercise has important benefits for your child's physical and emotive welfare and offers opportunities to have fun and interact with others socially.

Your child can continue any physical activity he/she practised before being diagnosed with diabetes.

All you have to do is make sure he/she has everything that might be necessary during the activity and that both your child and any adults present knows what has to be done to monitor his/her diabetes.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Exercise and play can affect your child's glycaemia. Exercise may lower glycaemia levels as a higher amount of glucose leaves the bloodstream to enter the body's cells. On occasions, excessively strenuous exercise can cause an additional increase in already high glycaemia levels, due to the release of "stress hormones". It is therefore important to control glycaemia levels before starting exercise and sometimes also during and after strenuous physical activity.
- Your child may need to eat more than normal when exercising. The best foods are those containing carbohydrates: favour complex carbohydrates in meals before sports meets and make sure your child has access to water and eats small amounts of simple carbohydrates every 30 – 60 minutes when exercising.



WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

With the medical team

Your child's dose of insulin may need to be decreased when exercising. Always check with your medical team before your child starts or goes back to any physical activity. The members of the team will provide the instructions you and your child need to manage his/her diabetes before, during and after exercise.

With your child

Going out and exercising is another way for your child to feel healthy. It is a moment in which the family's support is important. If you are concerned or anxious about your child exercising, he/she will catch on to these feelings and may feel nervous or less confident. Encourage him/her to take part. Let your child know that you firmly believe that he/she has great potential in any sport or activity he/she takes part in and he/she will be confident too.

It is essential to make sure that your child is able to recognise the signs of hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia, so that he/she knows when to take a break and which adjustments are required. Encourage your child to say when he/she needs to stop for a snack or to check his/her glycaemia levels. Tell your child never to be embarrassed about doing whatever is necessary to keep glycaemia within the preferred range.

With the coach/ camp leader/ supervising adult

Every adult that is responsible in any way for your child should have a basic knowledge of diabetes and how to help manage it; in other words, he/she should be aware of the importance of glycaemia monitoring and insulin, what to do if your child's glycaemia level is too high and the importance of keeping well hydrated. Exercise can raise or lower glycaemia levels. When they are playing, children can completely lose track of time, so make sure that either you or another adult nearby reminds your child to check his/her glycaemia when appropriate.

Emergency treatment must be available in the event of severe hypoglycaemia and a correctly trained adult should always be available to administer the treatment if necessary. For any questions on the use of emergency treatments, contact your doctor or a nurse.



PARTIES

Festivities, holidays, birthday parties at a friend's house: children with diabetes want to be able to take part without feeling embarrassed about their diabetes.

There is no reason why they should be left out because of their condition. It is completely normal to be worried about taking your child to a party after he/she has been diagnosed with diabetes. You will have to keep an eye on the sweets being served and the activities your child is involved in, but remember that special occasions can and must be special for your child too.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Talk to your medical team before the first party your child goes to after being diagnosed with diabetes; however there is no reason why your child cannot have the occasional piece of birthday cake or enjoy a treat just like the other children. Find out what he/she will be eating and ask your doctor how to adjust his/her insulin.
- Most parties will involve both an increase in sugar and in exercise for your child. If your child is active during a party and plays, dances and runs around, his/her insulin requirements may be different to usual. His/her glycaemia will need to be checked more often, when outside his/her normal dietary and/ or exercise routine.



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WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

With the medical team

Talk with your medical team about covering increased carbohydrate and insulin requirements for special occasions.

With your child

Teach your child to recognise the ingredients in different foods, help him/her to grow in terms of awareness and you will see that his/her choices will be responsible ones. Instead of banning or excluding foods, teach your child to think things through. If your child is given sweets or confectionary, establish a reasonable programme defining how they can be eaten.

Parties are another occasion on which children can lose track of time. Make sure that you or another adult remind your child when it's time to check his/her glycaemia levels.

If your child comes home with a bag of sweets (which is better than being offered a handful of sweets at the party), agree on a "sweet programme". One option is to allow your child just one sweet a day instead of other types of carbohydrate. Another option is to barter: get your child to swap a sweet for something else he/she likes, such as a toy, a film or a book.



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With the adult in charge of the party

Tell the person organising the party that your child is diabetic, to avoid surprises if your child has to check his/her glycaemia or administer insulin.

This might be a teacher, in the event of a school party or a parent in the case of a birthday party. It is a good idea to make contact before the party to find out what kind of food will be available and what activities are planned.

If you are concerned that your child will not be able to eat healthy alternative foods, send him/her to the party with his/her own snack and/or drinks.

Depending on your child's age and ability to take care of him/herself and the willingness of the adult organising the party, you could offer to help out, so that you can keep an eye on your child. But try to give your child room to have fun with his/her friends. Otherwise make sure that there is always an adult present who knows what your child needs to keep his/her glycaemia within the correct range.



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SLEEPOVERS

Everyone likes staying over at a friend's house, but it might be the first time your child stays at a friend's house after he/she has been diagnosed with diabetes. This is a big step for you as a parent, but it is also an exciting and fun experience for your child. Think about what happens when you sleep over at a friend's house: lots of games, laughter, films, fun, staying up late ...

You and your child should prepare yourselves by thinking about the impact staying up late can have on glycaemia levels. A night away from home is, of course, a much more complex issue than a day at school; however you will use lots of the same strategies to make it more feasible. And your child will be able to truly enjoy it.

Encourage your child to take part in teaching camps organised by your diabetes team; this will allow him/her to gain experience autonomously in a protected environment, so that he/she will be more confident when it comes to a sleepover or staying at someone else's house.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It is very likely that your child will stay up later than normal and it is therefore a good idea to provide a late-night snack in case his/her glycaemia drops.

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

With the medical team

Talk with your medical team about how to adjust insulin and food for the night on which your child will be up late.

With your child

Make sure your child is clear about how much insulin to take and when, depending on his/her glycaemia levels. Write these instructions down on a piece of paper, adding emergency telephone numbers.

Talk to your child and explain how to monitor his/her glucose and how to take insulin, even if you are not present. Tell your child that if he/she likes, you will ask the host parents to provide a place, for example a bathroom, in which he/she can have a bit of privacy.

This is a good time to make sure that your child remembers to follow the glycaemia monitoring programme. With all the fun and excitement of sleeping over at a friend's house, your child is likely to lose track of time.

With the host family

Make sure the parents hosting your child for the night know that your child is diabetic and what he/she needs to do to manage his/her diabetes, when he/she has to eat, take insulin, etc. Write a list of instructions for the hosting parents, including all the steps to be taken in the event of an emergency and a list of all the telephone numbers they may need.

Also remember to do everything you would for any other kind of party, in other words, find out what kind of food will be provided and what activities are planned.

EATING OUT

Eating out with the family is a special occasion for everyone, but it is particularly exciting for children. This experience doesn't have to change completely just because one of the people at the table has diabetes. Talk to your medical team about eating out, for most children with diabetes, there are no significant dietary restrictions: they just have to be careful about what they eat and make healthy choices.

This means that you do not have to worry too much about the type of restaurant to choose. There are, however, things that you can bear in mind before and during your meal out, to help your child to enjoy dinner and at the same time efficiently manage his/her diabetes.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Fats can slow down the rate at which the body absorbs sugars and therefore fat-rich meals can cause high glycaemia levels even for several hours after a meal.
- Sometimes, when eating in restaurants, you might eat later than usual. There is no problem with eating late if you have adjusted your child's insulin schedule accordingly.

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

With the medical team

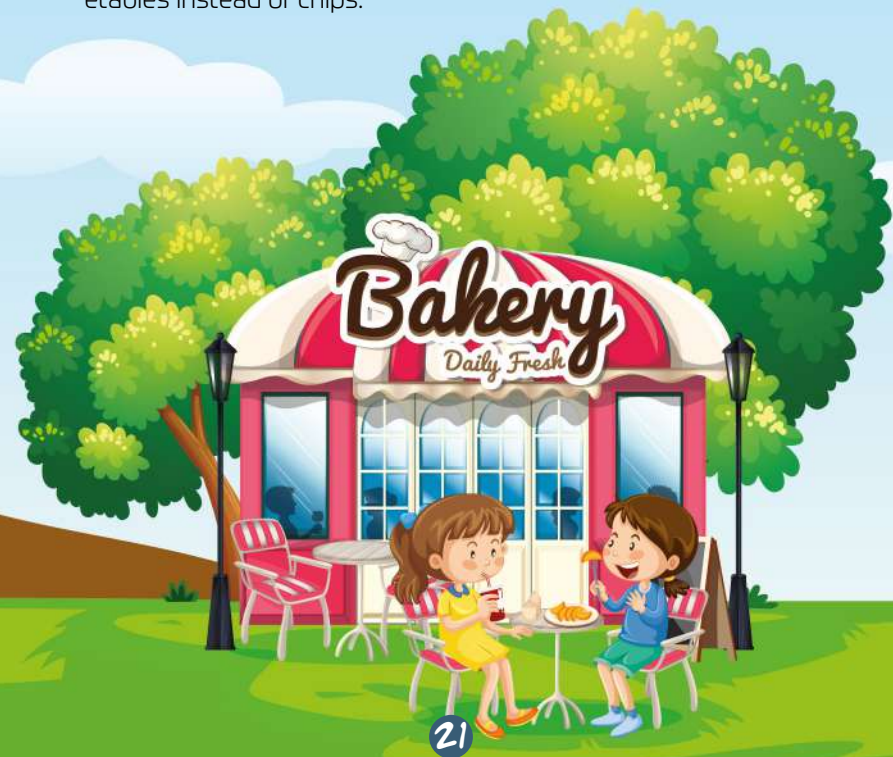
Ask your medical team how to adjust insulin when eating out or eating later than usual.

With your child

Teach your child to ask questions. If asked politely, restaurant owners and staff will be more than happy to provide information about the food on the menu or to cater for special dietary needs. Encourage your child to choose foods with low fat and carbohydrate contents.

With the waiter

Always ask questions. If you are unsure, find out how a certain food is prepared. Never be embarrassed to ask for something to be prepared in a different way (for example roasted rather than fried) or to replace one dish with another, for example, vegetables instead of chips.



WHAT TO PUT IN YOUR CHILD'S BAG OR RUCKSACK

Wherever your child goes, there are a number of essential things that he/she should always carry. Here is a list to help you make sure your child has everything he/she needs while out of the house:

- Medical card for emergencies
- Glycaemia control devices (for example, fingerstick, reactive strips, glucose meter, diary)
- Other devices needed to administer insulin (for example syringes or pens for insulin, needles, disinfectant wipes)
- Foods to be used to treat medium – low glycaemia such as sugar cubes, glucose tablets, sugar sweets, fruit juice and snacks such as rusks and crackers
- Emergency treatment for severe hypoglycaemia
- Telephone numbers to be contacted in the case of an emergency, for example your mobile or office number
- Alternative snacks/food if replacements have to be made.

The easiest solution is to have a bag or rucksack that is always ready to go, so that you don't have to pack one every time your child goes out.



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