

# An employee's guide to diabetes in the workplace



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# Introduction

People with diabetes can have long and successful working lives. They have interesting and mixed careers.

Diabetes Victoria has received questions and concerns from the diabetes community about working. This booklet was written to answer those questions and put you at ease.

In the following pages you will find information, hints and examples. You will start to learn what you are entitled to as a person with diabetes. The booklet will help you balance your diabetes with your rights and responsibilities in the workplace.





# Starting work and applying for a job

## When you are looking for a job, ask yourself these questions:

- Will diabetes stop me doing the job I want to do?
- What will happen if I have a “hypo” or my blood glucose level is low?
- What will happen if my blood glucose goes above my target levels?

- Do I need to tell my workplace I have diabetes?
- If I need to tell my workplace I have diabetes, when do I do this and what do I need to tell them?

Everyone’s diabetes is different. Workplaces and jobs are different. The following information will help you figure out how to handle your situation. That may be getting a new job or maintaining your current job.

## How do you figure out if a job is the right one for you?

Follow these steps before you apply:

### Step 1

If you see a job worth applying for, ask for a copy of the 'position description'. This is a document that will describe the roles and responsibilities of the job.

### Step 2

Read the position description. Look at the duties listed or described. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Will my diabetes affect my ability to do this job safely?
- If so, can I deal with it and how?

### Step 3

Think about whether there might be parts of the job that are not listed in the position description. Will you be able to do these things and manage your diabetes safely? Look out for examples like driving and / or operating machinery.

### Step 4

Look out for parts of the job that could make managing your diabetes hard. Examples are shift work and long distance travel. Think about the changes you need to make and how you would cope.

### Step 5

Decide if you need to tell your employer about your diabetes. You might not need or want to. More information about this is on pages 18 to 20.

### Step 6

If you decide to talk about having diabetes when you apply for a job, there are other things you need to think about:

- Is there anything about your diabetes that could risk your safety, or the safety of people you work with?
- How will you manage hypos at work?
- Is there a place to store your medicines and / or insulin if you need to?

- Will you be given extra time to stop working and look after your diabetes? (This will be on top of normal breaks).
- Will you be able to find a private space to give insulin if you need to?
- How will you safely dispose of sharps and medical waste?
- Are you able to take lots of breaks to use the toilet and / or get drinks if you need to?
- Will you be asked to drive a car that belongs to your workplace or employer?

If you have decided to talk about your diabetes when you apply for a job, make a note of any questions you may have. You can then discuss these with the person listed on the position description or the human resources department.

## Can I expect to be given a 'fair go' when applying for a job?

**Yes.**

When you apply for a job, you can expect to have the same rights as a person who does not have diabetes. You have the right to be offered a job if your skills and experience meet the requirements. Please go to page 8 to learn about the careers and jobs that are currently not an option for people with diabetes.

Most employers want to have a wide range of people working for them. This usually means they will have a productive, creative and skillful workforce. Unfortunately, this does not always happen.



***It is against the law to treat people with diabetes unfairly in the workplace.***

Sometimes employers make judgements and assumptions about people because of the following reasons:

- Cultural background
- Age
- Gender
- Disability
- Impairment.

Diabetes is legally recognised as a disability under laws in Australia. These laws include social security, equal opportunity and human rights.



## Will I be discriminated against because of my diabetes?

When you apply for a job, you have the right to be treated fairly at all times. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Asking for the position description
- Filling out application forms
- Being interviewed and asked questions
- Having a medical examination
- Taking tests to grade your academic ability
- Taking tests about your personality type
- Having your references checked
- The final decision to offer you the job.

The process is to be fair at all times. It does not matter whether you are applying for your first job, your last job or a promotion.

For more information about your rights, contact:

**Victorian Equal Opportunity  
& Human Rights Commission**

When an employer chooses people to work for them, they are obligated to think about the person's skills and experience.

Employers can ask people questions about their diabetes or other medical conditions if the person has told them. This is to help them decide whether the person is able to do the job safely.

Read pages 14 to 21 for more information about your rights and responsibilities.

## **Are there careers and jobs I will be excluded from due to my diabetes?**

**Yes.**

Some jobs are considered 'safety sensitive'. This means, if you have a hypo you may put people, property or the environment at risk. The following jobs have certain limits for people with diabetes.

### **Australian Armed Forces**

If you take insulin you cannot serve in the Armed Forces. All members of the Armed Forces

must meet certain criteria. This is one employer who does not have to include people who do not meet their criteria.

### **Police Force, Fire and Ambulance Services**

If you want to apply for a job in any of these industries, you need to check out what the requirements are in your state or territory. The processes and conditions are different across Australia.

### **Transport of passengers**

e.g. aeroplanes, buses, trains and trams.

### **Transporting hazardous (dangerous) materials or large cargos**

e.g. explosives and petrol.

### **Working at heights**

e.g. on construction sites and ladders.

### **Jobs involving the use of potentially dangerous machinery**

e.g. large pieces of machinery or equipment used in construction,

manufacturing or engineering industries, heavy vehicles or heavy hydraulics

### Working offshore

e.g. on an oil rig.

### Prison Service / Community Correction

Prison Officer, Community Corrections Officer, Field Officer

### Taxi Drivers / Uber Drivers

If you live in Victoria and take insulin, your medical case will be assessed. You will need to provide medical reports from your endocrinologist (diabetes specialist) supporting your application.

### Flight Cabin Crew

If you take insulin, your medical case will be assessed by the airline doctor. You will need to provide medical reports from your endocrinologist supporting your

application. Jobs are limited to flights that have multi-crews with commercial airlines.

If you are interested in applying for any job and you are not sure, just ask. There should be staff in recruitment, human resources or medical advisory roles who can help you. In organisations where safety is a factor, there should be clear policies and procedures in place.

Keep in mind that restrictions may apply depending on the type of diabetes you have and how you manage it. For example, specific restrictions may apply if you take insulin, but not if you take oral medications.

You can contact **WorkSafe Victoria** and/or a member of **Diabetes Victoria's Advocacy Team**. There is more information on pages 14 to 21 about your rights and responsibilities.



***These jobs can be worked by people with diabetes. Each situation needs to be assessed carefully and thoroughly.***



# Changing jobs and planning for retirement

**What if I am already working in a restricted industry and I get diagnosed with diabetes? What changes if I need to take insulin?**

If you have a job in a restricted industry and then get diagnosed with diabetes, you might need to change jobs. Your current employer is legally required to offer you another job that does not have restrictions. This is the law.

**As a person with diabetes, will I be able to keep my job?**

Most people are able to keep their jobs after they are diagnosed with diabetes. This can be easier with information and support from your diabetes health care team. There is more information on page 36, 'Managing your diabetes at work'.

## What if I cannot work anymore?

It is important to get expert advice before making any decisions. After being diagnosed with diabetes, if you can't work or you have to reduce your hours, you need to find out what your rights are.

You might be entitled to one, (or more) of the following:

- Benefits through your superannuation policy
- Benefits through your insurance policy, or
- Rights under employment law.

Most superannuation funds offer lump sum disability payments and / or lifetime income protection benefits. Most people do not understand what they are entitled to.

### **Before you stop work or reduce your hours due to having diabetes,**

it is important to get advice from a legal professional. The way you stop work may have a big effect on what entitlements you may have. It is important to look at all possibilities so you can continue to earn enough money to pay for all your living expenses.



## What if I am self-employed and have to stop working due to having diabetes?

There are many things to consider if you are in this situation.

This may include:

- Continuing to work where possible
- Employing a temporary caretaker
- Handing over the business
- Making choices about selling, or
- Closing.

It is best to discuss your situation and these options with a specialist. Contact **Small Business Victoria**.



## What about planning for retirement?

If your health declines or your treatment changes, you might need to think about retiring early. It is very important that you seek help from a financial advisor about your superannuation, insurance and disability payments **before** you take action.

When you change from paid work to retirement, getting the right information for you is important. You might need to attend retirement planning seminars or meet with a financial advisor including **Centrelink**.

You might also need emotional help to cope with these changes in your life. Discuss this with your health care team and they can refer you to the right services. For example, your GP (doctor) can write you a Mental Health Care Plan and Medicare will fund appointments with approved mental health professionals. **Diabetes Victoria** can also provide information and support.





# Your rights and responsibilities

## Are there laws to protect me against discrimination in the workplace?

**Yes.**

Under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic), the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and other Acts, all employers have legal obligations and responsibilities. Anti-discrimination laws apply to all work places.

These laws protect all employees. This is to make sure you are offered a job based on merit.

Other key anti-discrimination laws include:

- Fair Work Act (2009)
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act (1986)
- Sex Discrimination Act (1984)
- Racial Discrimination Act (1975)
- Age Discrimination Act (2004)
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act (2001)
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act Victoria (2006).

If your situation involves more than one of the areas listed above, you can choose where to lodge your complaint.

For more information contact the **Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission**.

## Direct and indirect discrimination under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Rights Act (2010).

**Direct Discrimination** is when someone has treated you unfairly because you have diabetes.

Examples where this happens is if your employer:

- Refuses to employ you after you are found to have diabetes (unless it is safety sensitive work)
- Limits your job responsibilities
- Refuses to offer you promotions and training after you are found to have diabetes
- Fires you when you are diagnosed with diabetes.

**Indirect discrimination** happens when things at work appear fair, but they are not. Cases

usually centre on a particular characteristic of a person. In your situation it could be diabetes.

Examples where this happens is if your employer does not:

- Allow you to take regular meals or snack breaks
- Offer a private space to check your blood glucose levels
- Offer a private space where you can give insulin.

Discrimination in the work place often happens because your employer and / or colleagues do not understand diabetes and how you manage it.

If questions are asked about your ability to do a job, you may need to prove that it has nothing to do with your diabetes. You may be asked to provide a medical report from your endocrinologist stating that you are fit to perform all the essential tasks and duties of your job. You could suggest a trial period is agreed on by you and your employer before you are given permanent employment. This will give you time to show your employer that diabetes is not stopping you from doing your job.

## Who is responsible if discrimination occurs in the work place?

While at work, **employers** are legally responsible for the behaviour of their staff. If a staff member discriminates against another staff member, the managers and owners are legally responsible. You can lodge a complaint about discrimination happening in the work place with the **Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission**.

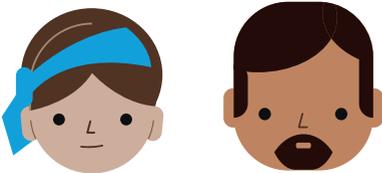
**Employers** are also legally responsible if discrimination happens in the recruitment process. This includes external organisations and consultants contracted to recruit staff.

## Are there occasions when an employer can discriminate?

**Yes.**

If you work in a safety sensitive job, or you cannot do the work because you have diabetes, your employer does not have to employ you. Your employer may have asked for a medical report from your endocrinologist and given you additional support to help manage your diabetes. If you still cannot do the job, then they can discriminate. These situations are not very common. For example, an electrician with diabetes is unable to work at heights due to frequent and undetected hypos.

A court or tribunal order can authorise discrimination in the work place for reasons relating to your diabetes. This is under the provision of an Act of Parliament or regulation under an Act.



## Do I need to tell my employer and/or colleagues that I have diabetes?

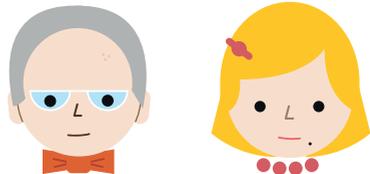
In most cases it is up to you to decide whether to tell your employer and/or colleagues that you have diabetes. However, it is important to figure out if your diabetes will affect work safety or insurance. If it does, you must let your employer know.

Here are some things to think about before telling your workplace you have diabetes:

- Why do I need to tell people I have diabetes?
- How do I tell people I have diabetes?
- Do I have to talk about my diabetes in a job interview?
- What happens if I get a job and my diabetes management changes over time?
- Could my diabetes affect my safety in the workplace?
- Could my diabetes affect the safety of others in the workplace?

- The type of work you do
- If you need to drive a company car or operate machinery
- If the side effects of medication you are taking impacts on your work performance
- **WorkSafe** and workplace insurance requirements to tell your employer about medical conditions
- If diabetes was the reason you had an accident or were injured in the workplace but you had not told your employer in writing, an insurance claim may be refused.

If you are unsure about any of this, you can discuss it with your diabetes health care team, a legal advisor or a member of **Diabetes Victoria's Advocacy Team**.



## Do I need to seek advice before I tell my employer and / or colleagues I have diabetes?

**Yes.**

It is recommended that you seek advice from an independent adviser before telling those at your workplace about your diabetes.

The following people and services may be able to assist you:

- Disability Discrimination Legal Service
- Legal adviser, and / or
- Your union delegate (if you are a member).

Here are some personal experiences about the reasons why people **do** or **do not** tell those at work about their diabetes.

## Why tell an employer:

*‘So that I can negotiate reasonable adjustments as part of my work conditions’*

– **Jill**, tertiary student with type 1 diabetes, who was going for a part-time job in telemarketing. She wanted to make sure that she could have time off to check her blood glucose levels, have snacks and toilet breaks.

*‘Because I want to start the job with an open exchange of information’*

– **Robert**, who is mid-career and was applying for a promotion in the teaching profession. He has type 2 diabetes and just started on insulin.



## Why not tell an employer:

*'I fear that I might be discriminated against and not get the job because of my condition'*

– **Robert**, a 54-year-old scientist with type 2 diabetes who was applying for a promotion that could involve an overseas posting.

*'I feel it (diabetes) is private and no one else's business and I have a concern that my medical information may not be kept confidential'*

– **Susan**, a 24-year-old registered nurse with type 1 diabetes working in a public hospital.

## Do I need to say I have diabetes on the job application or when I have been offered the job?

If your diabetes affects your ability to do your job fully, your safety at work or if it could put the safety of co-workers at risk, then it is probably best to tell them you have diabetes.

**Mary** is a 55-year-old health professional recently diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. She chose to disclose her diabetes to her employer with a letter from her treating endocrinologist. The letter stated that she has type 2 diabetes, was receiving treatment and in the doctor's opinion, Mary is fit to perform all of her duties.



***While at work, employers are legally responsible for the behaviour of their staff. Employers are also legally responsible if discrimination happens in the recruitment process.***

## Do I need to tell my employer I have diabetes if my work involves driving?

Check with your employer's car insurance company as to whether you need to tell them you have diabetes and drive a company car.

In general, if you have type 1 diabetes or type 2 diabetes managed with insulin or glucose lowering agents you have a legal responsibility to notify VicRoads Medical Review of this health condition.

If you have type 2 diabetes managed by diet and physical activity alone, you do not have to notify VicRoads.

**If you are driving at work, check with your workplace as to whether you need to notify VicRoads. If you haven't notified them and you are involved in a crash, you could be sued under common law and/or charged with driving offences. In addition, your employer's insurance company may not provide cover.**

For more information about diabetes and driving, speak with your diabetes educator, endocrinologist, Vic Roads Medical Review staff or a member of **Diabetes Victoria's Advocacy Team**.

## Do I have to tell my superannuation fund or insurance company I have diabetes?

**Sometimes.** Terms and conditions can vary across superannuation funds. You need to check the fund's Product Disclosure Statement to be clear about what you are covered for and whether you have to tell the fund about your diabetes. If you start a job or join a superannuation fund, check to see whether you can get automatic insurance cover without answering any health questions. Check if a particular insurance policy requires you to fill out a health questionnaire. Not telling the company that you have diabetes may mean that your insurance policy can be cancelled and/or you may not be able to make a claim.

## Do I have a right to reasonable adjustments in the workplace?

**Yes.** A reasonable adjustment is a change made at a workplace to enable a person with a disability to fully do their job safely.

Employers are required to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace unless making adjustments results in an 'unjustifiable hardship' (usually financial cost) to their business.

Some examples of reasonable adjustments in the workplace include:

- Maintaining confidentiality about your medical condition
- Flexibility with breaks, meeting times, medical appointments and shifts
- Extra regular breaks in addition to the minimum award provisions so you can look after your diabetes eg. take insulin or medication, check blood glucose levels and eat snacks or meals

- A private and clean place to check your blood glucose levels and take insulin
- 'Hypo' prevention and treatment supplies at your work station
- A sharps container for the safe disposal of medical waste
- An enlarged computer screen for those with impaired vision.

The federal government provides funds for employers to help with costs that may be associated with workplace adjustments under **JobAccess**.

## What about unfair dismissal?

**The Fair Work Commission** deals with claims of unfair dismissal.



# Personal stories

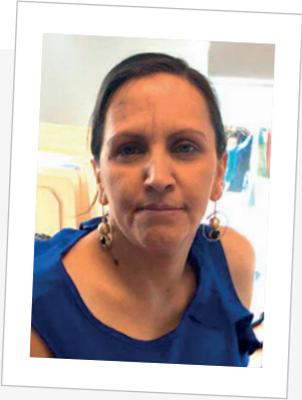


**Nathan** is 37 years old and was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at aged 7. He has a management position with a government department, working in policy development in environment protection. He says he has always been very open and honest with work colleagues about having diabetes. He says his employer is great and very supportive. He has never felt judged or discriminated against.

"I have a team of people who work for me and have found that being open about my diabetes, and what I have to do to manage works for me. In meetings I feel comfortable testing my blood sugar levels and letting people know if I need a snack because I'm going low.

"I have found that most people are genuinely curious leading to conversations ranging from the causes of diabetes to diet and treatment. I think it's important for people to understand that diabetes doesn't stop me from achieving anything." Nathan has recently moved onto a pump after 29 years of taking injections. He says, "there was no particular reason for making the change but felt it would provide better control and even more flexibility. So far it's going very well."

Nathan leads an active life. He has a 5 year old daughter and 7 year old son and goes to the gym 3-4 times a week. He is also studying psychology, part time, at one of Melbourne's leading universities. "I have always been very much of the view that having diabetes doesn't stop you from doing whatever you want to do. Most people have been caring and curious and when I tell them I have diabetes, they just carry on as usual. Being open, honest, secure in myself and letting people know has worked for me."

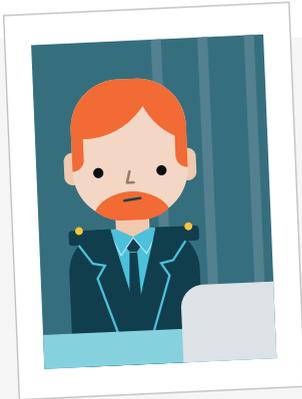


**Paula** has type 1 diabetes and was diagnosed 13 years ago. For the last 17 years she has worked part time in human resources at an Aboriginal child care agency. She says her colleagues are aware she has diabetes and are very accepting and encouraging of her managing it at work.

“I am open and honest about it. I regularly check my blood glucose levels and take my insulin at my desk. I’ve had a few hypos at work. My close colleagues know what to do if I need their help or they just leave me to it. They’re very understanding.

“I was not travelling all that well last year and spent some time in hospital. It was a bit of a wake-up call. A few months ago I started on a CGM as I was experiencing a few hypos at night. It’s been interesting and given me a bit of an insight into what’s happening with my diabetes especially at night. I regularly talk to my diabetes educator at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and she gives me great support. I also see my endocrinologist every six months.”

Paula has two daughters, a 5 year old and a 23 year old. “They keep me busy and active. I also go to the gym and walk regularly. I am trying to be more strict with my diet.”



**Stewart** (not his real name) was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes about 14 years ago and was put on insulin at the same time. He worked as a store supervisor in a minimum security prison for 5 years from 2009-2014. During his time at the prison, the prisoner population increased almost threefold. Unfortunately the staff were not increased by the same proportion.

This additional workload resulted in Stewart unable to manage his diabetes because of the stress of the work and his inability to eat properly or exercise during the day because of the sheer volume of work to be done.

Stewart then experienced fluctuating blood glucose levels, fluctuating mood and behaviour, low energy levels, blurred vision and impaired cognition as a result of this working environment.

He was suspended from his position in 2014 and then stood down in 2015 for 'misconduct allegations'.

Stewart met with a barrister and decided to take his case to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission for discrimination/indirect discrimination under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 in 2015 against his employer. He attended mediation with his employer and the case was then referred to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

He obtained copies of all his medical reports from the health professionals he was seeing, supporting his emotional and physical state around the time of his high stress and suspension.

In late 2017 the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found a claim of indirect discrimination against his employer. Stewart was pleased with the decision and is currently considering his options for compensation.



**Hana** is applying for her first job as a scientist. She put in her job application and is going to the first interview next week. She is unsure as to whether she should tell a potential employer about her longstanding type 1 diabetes.

She decided to call her state diabetes organisation for help.

### She took the following steps over the week:

- Contacted the human resources department at this workplace for a copy of the job description
- Chose to hold off disclosing her health condition to this employer until she was offered the job in writing. When attending a pre-employment medical, she disclosed her type 1 diabetes and had a medical report ready from her endocrinologist confirming her diabetes management was on track
- Sought advice from her state disability legal centre on how to disclose her health condition to her employer to make sure she was covered for all workplace safety and insurances when she was offered the job
- Looked at the website for her local Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to confirm she was up-to-date on the law to protect her rights
- Downloaded the Diabetes in the Workplace booklets available from her local diabetes organisation as it listed local places to get help.



**Simon** has been a construction worker for 40 plus years and has had type 1 diabetes for 30 years. He has managed several other health conditions alongside diabetes but it is all taking a toll on his body. Simon thinks it is time to cut back on hours and is considering stopping work. After talking this over with his partner, diabetes educator and union representative, he calls his local state diabetes organisation to talk about his plan.

### Over the next two months Simon decided to:

- Seek no-cost legal advice from an employment lawyer arranged via his union. He learnt about the wording to use in correspondence to his employer to protect his rights and financial entitlements
- Had his union representative present in key discussions with his employer
- Had a medical report from his endocrinologist about his current work capacity
- Consulted his superannuation fund and learnt about possible access to insurance components in a lump sum
- Downloaded information from the Centrelink website and spoke with staff at his state Social Security Rights Centre about payments and allowances
- Downloaded the workplace employee's and employer's booklets from the Diabetes Victoria website
- Talked with his GP about his mental health and arranged to make an appointment for a Medicare funded psychologist
- Downloaded information sheets from the Beyondblue website and found out about his local Men's Shed
- Had the telephone number for 24/7 Men's Helpline on the fridge if he needed to talk with someone outside the family
- Attended a type 1 event on emotional health and peer support organised by his state diabetes organisation in a local community hall.





# Safety at work

## How can diabetes affect work performance?

Diabetes could affect how well you can do your job if it affects your:

- Ability to make decisions and concentrate
- Level of co-ordination
- Muscle control
- Ability to stay awake.

This could lead to an increased risk of workplace injury to yourself or your co-workers.

## Hypoglycaemia

Hypoglycaemia is when your blood glucose level drops below 4mmol/L. You may experience hypoglycaemia if you inject insulin or are taking certain tablets to manage your diabetes. Hypoglycaemia can cause shaking, weakness, blurred vision, drowsiness, reduced thinking and reasoning. It may also lead to unconsciousness if not treated early.

Check with your pharmacist to see if any of your medicines have the side effect of hypoglycaemia.

When a person's blood glucose level drops below 5mmol/L, their ability to drive safely is reduced.

### Hypo unawareness

People with long-standing diabetes, who are insulin treated and have frequent hypoglycaemia, may not experience the usual symptoms of hypoglycaemia. Blood glucose levels can become dangerously low and if untreated this can result in unconsciousness. Hypoglycaemia can be unsafe and can potentially put you and others at risk. If you are at risk of hypoglycaemia or are 'hypo unaware' it is recommended that you tell a trusted colleague, first-aid worker or human resources staff, particularly if you work in a hazardous or safety sensitive job.



### Managing hypoglycaemia at work

Hypoglycaemia can be classified as:

- **Mild** where the person is able to treat their own hypo; or
- **Severe** where the person needs assistance from another person.

It is important that a mild hypo is treated as quickly as possible and appropriately to stop the person's blood glucose level from dropping lower, which could lead to a severe hypo.

If you choose to tell trusted colleagues about hypos:

- tell them what to expect
- how they can best help you if you require assistance and where you keep your hypo treatment.

In the case of a **severe** hypo:

- Tell your co-workers to call for an ambulance (Dial 000) and state that it is a diabetes emergency
- Give co-workers a copy of the Hypoglycaemia Emergency Information sheet at the back of this booklet

- Describe your usual signs and symptoms of hypoglycaemia
- Warn colleagues that during a hypo you may not be very co-operative and may even resist their attempts to help
- If you have a mobile phone, put the abbreviation 'ICE' (In Case of Emergency) and your emergency contact's details into your contact list. This will alert emergency medical staff that this is the person to call in case of an emergency
- Make up a 'hypo kit' to keep at your workplace.

### Hypo kit

- Hypoglycaemia Emergency Information sheet
- Fast-acting carbohydrate such as jelly beans, glucose tablets, non-diet soft drink
- Slow-acting carbohydrate such as muesli bars or small packet of dry biscuits
- Doctors and hospital contact numbers
- Emergency contact details; e.g. your next of kin.

## Could I lose my job if I am having hypos at work?

**Possibly.** Having regular hypos at work may prevent you from satisfactorily and safely performing the inherent requirements of your job and may put yourself or others in danger. It could result in you losing your job. In keeping with employment and equal opportunity and human rights laws, your employer would be required to go through a formal process before this could happen.

As part of the process, your employer could organise a medical assessment to help determine your ability to perform the inherent requirements of your job. They can also help identify if there are changes at work that can be made to help you in being able to keep your job. Your employer would need to consider a range of things to help you, which could include moving to a different work area. If you experience regular or severe hypos, it is most important to have this reviewed by your treating endocrinologist and/or diabetes educator as soon as possible.

They will be able to review your diabetes management plan and suggest changes aimed at preventing regular episodes of hypoglycaemia.

## Can my employer ask to see my blood glucose results?

**No.** Your employer does not have the right to ask you for your blood glucose results. This is an invasion of your privacy.

If your employer believes that your diabetes is affecting your ability to do your job as described in your position description, they are able to ask you to prove that you are medically fit to do your job. You may be asked for a letter from a member of your diabetes treating team (ie. your GP, diabetes educator or endocrinologist) commenting on your medical fitness to carry out the essential duties of your work.

## Hyperglycaemia

Non-stop blood glucose levels above target can cause:

- Tiredness
- Lack of energy
- Irritability
- Thirst
- Going to the toilet more frequently
- Blurred vision.

Hyperglycaemia can also affect:

- Thinking
- Concentration
- Memory
- Problem solving
- Reasoning.

To avoid this, a person with diabetes may need to check blood glucose levels and take extra insulin at times while at work.

## Diabetes complications

Diabetes can damage the nerves, eyes, heart, kidneys, feet and blood vessels. Everyone in the workplace including people with diabetes may have anxiety, depression and/or other mental health conditions.

Some people may also be managing diabetes complications and still be fit to undertake the inherent requirements of their job. They may require extra time to attend medical appointments (eg. dialysis or eye surgery). You will need to discuss 'reasonable adjustments' with your employer to see whether there is enough

flexibility in the role to enable you to attend such appointments. This also needs to be documented in your diabetes management and care plan so you can fully do your job safely. It is recommended that you discuss these matters with your endocrinologist, doctor and diabetes educator.

Examples of such strategies include:

- Protective footwear (the person may need special footwear ordered by a podiatrist)
- Avoid standing for long periods of time
- Taking annual leave.



## Driving and safety at work

If blood glucose levels are out of target and/or someone has diabetes complications, this can reduce the ability to drive safely. It is never safe to drive while having a hypo. But if blood glucose levels are above target that can also affect driving safety.

Refer to the section on driving at work on pages 8 and 9, and the Diabetes Victoria website.

## Do I need to wear medical identification if I have diabetes?

**This is up to you to decide.** It is a good idea to wear or carry some sort of medical identification that lets people know that you may need urgent medical help.

## Hazardous (high risk) jobs

Many jobs involve a degree of hazard or risk. For example, working near heavy machinery, driving a forklift in a warehouse, or being on a ladder at a building site. If your job requires that you take on hazardous tasks, you need to make sure that your blood glucose levels are as stable as possible and you reduce the risks involved.



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***Check your blood glucose level and ensure it is above 5 mmol/L before driving***

## Operating heavy machinery

If you use heavy machinery, including a forklift, and/or require a commercial vehicle licence as part of your job, you have a responsibility to carry out your job fully and safely. Have your diabetes management reviewed by your doctor. Check your blood glucose levels regularly and as with driving aim for between 5 and 10mmol/L.

You may be taking medications that could impact on your ability to safely operate heavy machinery. Check this with your endocrinologist, doctor, pharmacist or the Medicines Line from the National Prescribing Service. Contact details are at the back of this booklet.



## Personal protective clothing

Some jobs require their employees to wear protective clothing and footwear for safety reasons. For example, steel capped boots or over-shoes. A podiatrist can help give you advice and recommendations about footwear at work.

### Tips for staying safe at work if you are at risk of having a hypo:

Check your blood glucose level before undertaking high risk tasks, operating machinery or driving. Make sure that your blood glucose level is above 5mmol/L and below 10mmol/L before starting and during tasks.

- Check your blood glucose levels regularly if the task is lengthy
- If you need to, take regular meal breaks and snacks
- If you experience signs or symptoms of hypoglycaemia, or your blood glucose levels are less than 4mmol/L, even if you have no symptoms, stop and treat it immediately.





# Managing your diabetes at work

## Getting the balance right

Your individual diabetes management and care plan needs to include a section on work. It is recommended that you discuss the detail of your work with the members of your diabetes health care team.

This section offers a general checklist of items to discuss with your health professionals:

- Updating your plan if your blood glucose levels are often below or above target
- Having a place to keep your meter that is close to your work place so you can check your blood glucose levels when you want to
- Having a clean and private place to take your insulin

- Working out how and where to safely store your insulin
- Knowing your entitlements and rights about time off to attend medical appointments
- Having a sick day plan in place
- Making insulin and food intake adjustments that take account of increased physical activity as part of your job
- Working on ways to remove/reduce workplace stress
- Ways to deal with shift work including menu and snack plans while on night duty
- Planning for travelling or an overseas posting
- Working out ways to get rid of your sharps and medical waste safely
- How to get the work life balance right for you.

If you require any help with your rights and/or responsibilities at work, contact a member of

**Diabetes Victoria's Advocacy Team.**

## Tips on how to undertake shift work and manage your diabetes:

- Ask for regular days, hours and fewer shift changes
- Ask for regular times for meal and snack breaks
- Check your blood glucose levels regularly to see how the different hours affect you. This will help you work out if you need to make changes to your insulin/medication
- If you need medication and/or insulin to manage your diabetes you may need to change the times you take them to fit in with your different working, sleeping and eating times
- If shift work is making it hard to manage your diabetes, you may be able to talk to your employer and change your work hours. You will need to get a medical certificate or a letter from your doctor, diabetes educator or endocrinologist.

## Concluding comment

People with diabetes have a wide range of jobs and most have fulfilling and rewarding careers until retirement. After retiring from work many continue to remain active, and make contributions to their communities in many ways. If you have diabetes and face difficulties during any stage of your working life, you are not alone. There are services, resources and people to talk to who can help.





# Definitions

## Employment

The Federal Workplace Relations Act 1996 defines employment as a contract of service, whether a person is employed under a certified agreement, employment agreement or an award. The Public Administration Act 2004 defines employment as the engagement of a person under a contract to provide a service. Work is also defined to be when a person is remunerated (paid), even on commission.

## Endocrinologist

An endocrinologist is a medical doctor who specialises in diabetes and illnesses of the endocrine system.

## Type 1 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas is unable to make the hormone insulin. Insulin is necessary to allow the body to use glucose for energy. Type 1 diabetes is treated with insulin which is given with injections several times a day or by an insulin pump. Only 10 to 15 out of 100 people with diabetes have type 1 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition. This means the body's own immune system destroys the cells that make insulin.

## Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes is a condition where the pancreas still makes insulin, but it may not make enough, or the insulin that is being made, does not do its job properly. If glucose cannot enter the cells, it builds up in the blood stream and causes blood glucose levels to rise. Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes and affects 85 to 90 of every

100 people with diabetes. It usually develops in adults over the age of 45, but is now being seen in younger people too. In the early stages type 2 diabetes can often be managed with a healthy lifestyle. Over time many people with type 2 diabetes need medication and/or insulin injections as well.



# Where can I get help and more information?

## AED Legal Centre

The AED Legal Centre provides legal advocacy to people with a disability (including diabetes) in the areas of employment, education and training.

Call (03) 9639 4333 or visit  
→ [www.aed.org.au](http://www.aed.org.au)

## Ambulance Victoria

Provides emergency transport to medical care for people living in Victoria. All Health Care Card holders and those currently receiving a Centrelink pension are covered automatically by this service. In case of an emergency, dial 000 and state diabetes emergency.

For more information about membership and services call 1800 64 84 84 or visit  
→ [www.ambulance.vic.gov.au](http://www.ambulance.vic.gov.au)

## Australian Diabetes Educators Association

Helps you to find a credentialed diabetes educator.

Call (02) 6287 4822, email [inquiries@adea.com.au](mailto:inquiries@adea.com.au) or visit  
→ [www.adea.com.au](http://www.adea.com.au)

## Australian Podiatry Association

Helps you to find a diabetes podiatrist.

Call (03) 9416 3111, email [apodc@apodc.com.au](mailto:apodc@apodc.com.au) or visit  
→ [www.apodc.com.au](http://www.apodc.com.au)



## Beyondblue

Beyondblue is a national independent, not-for-profit organisation that promotes good mental health, tackles stigma and discrimination and provides support and information on anxiety, depression and suicide. beyondblue has information specifically about the workplace and is able to link you to professional help.

Call 1300 22 4636 or visit  
→ [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

## Berrill & Watson

Berrill & Watson lawyers are specialists in superannuation and insurance issues for people with a disability.

Call 03 9448 8048 or visit  
→ [www.berrillwatson.com.au](http://www.berrillwatson.com.au)

## Business Victoria

Business Victoria offers a range of online resources to help develop and run businesses in Victoria.

Call (03) 9651 9999 or 132 215. They also offer advice when dealing with an illness. For more information visit

→ [www.business.vic.gov.au](http://www.business.vic.gov.au)

## Centrelink

Centrelink is an Australian Government agency that assists people with income security, provides help to those of working age to find a job, and supports those in need. Contact your nearest Centrelink office for more information about income support options including pensions, payments and benefits.

Call their appointment line on 132 307 or visit  
→ [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

## Chronic Illness Alliance - workwelfarewills

This organisation offers an online, plain English guide to legal issues around health and life changes. Created for people whose illness is affecting their ability to work. Visit

→ [www.chronicillness.org.au/workwelfarewills](http://www.chronicillness.org.au/workwelfarewills)

## Diabetes Victoria

Diabetes Victoria is the peak consumer body and leading charity representing all people affected by diabetes and those at risk.

For website information sheets, linkage to services, resources and advocacy call Diabetes Victoria on 1300 437 386 or visit

→ [www.diabetesvic.org.au](http://www.diabetesvic.org.au)

## Dietitians Association of Australia

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the profession, with branches in each state and territory. The DAA has a database of Accredited Practising Dietitians (APD) to help you locate a dietitian.

Call 1800 812 942 or visit

→ [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

## Fair Work Commission

Fair Work Commission is the national workplace relations tribunal. It is an independent body with the power to carry out a range of functions relating to:

- The safety net of minimum wages and employment conditions
- Enterprise bargaining
- Industrial action/unfair dismissal
- Termination of employment
- Other workplace matters.

Call 1300 799 675 during business hours or visit → [www.fwc.gov.au](http://www.fwc.gov.au)

## Health Complaints Commissioner

The Health Complaints Commissioner helps resolve complaints about health services and the handling of health information in Victoria.

Call 1300 582 113 or

→ [visit hcc.vic.gov.au/about](http://visit hcc.vic.gov.au/about)

## JobAccess

JobAccess is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. It provides information on financial support, workplace modifications, help with finding and changing jobs, creating flexible work environments, links to career advice and training courses and a range of other tools and resources for people with a disability, employers and service providers.

JobAccess Advisers can be contacted on 1800 464 800 or visit  
→ [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au)

## Job Watch

Job Watch is an Employment Rights Community Legal Centre which offers a free and confidential telephone information and referral service to Victorian workers about their rights at work.

Call (03) 9662 1933 or toll free 1800 331 617 or visit  
→ [www.job-watch.org.au](http://www.job-watch.org.au)

## Justice Connect

Justice Connect helps people who are disadvantaged, unable to get legal aid and cannot afford a lawyer get free legal help from a solicitor and/or barrister.

Call 8636 4400 or visit  
→ [www.justiceconnect.org.au](http://www.justiceconnect.org.au)

## Maurice Blackburn Lawyers

Maurice Blackburn Lawyers are specialists in employment, superannuation and insurance issues for people with a disability.

Call 1800 991 597 or visit  
→ [www.mauriceblackburn.com.au](http://www.mauriceblackburn.com.au)

## Medical identification

A range of products are available that provide essential medical and contact information in emergencies. Discuss this with a member of your diabetes treating team.

## Medicare

Contact Medicare and/or your local doctor for more information about access to allied health services funded by Medicare.

Call 132 011, visit

→ [www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/medicare](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/medicare)

or attend a Medicare office.

## National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Line

The National Prescribing Service's Medicines Line provides consumers with independent, accurate and evidence-based information on prescription, over-the-counter and complementary (herbal/'natural'/vitamin/mineral) medicines.

Call 1300 633 424.

## Social Security Rights Victoria

Social Security Rights Victoria (SSRV) provides information and help to people in the area of welfare rights and social security law ie. Centrelink.

Call 9481 0355 or visit

→ [www.ssrv.org.au](http://www.ssrv.org.au).

## VicRoads

VicRoads provides road, registration and licensing services, including medical reviews throughout Victoria.

Call 13 11 71 or visit

→ [www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au)

## Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

The Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission can help resolve complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment and racial and religious vilification.

Call their enquiry line on 1300 292 153 or visit

→ [www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)



## Victoria Law Foundation

Victoria Law Foundation is an independent, community organisation helping Victorians understand the law and use it to improve their lives. They do not provide legal advice.

Call (03) 9604 8100 or visit  
→ [www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/about-us](http://www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/about-us)

## Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid provides free or low cost legal advice.

Call 1300 792 387 or visit  
→ [www.legalaid.vic.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au)

## Victorian Legal Services Board & Commissioner

The Victorian Legal Services Board & Commissioner are responsible for overseeing the legal profession in Victoria, providing education and looking into complaints about lawyers.

Call (03) 9679 8001 or 1300 796 344 or visit → [www.lsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.lsc.vic.gov.au)

## Victorian Ombudsman

The Victorian Ombudsman takes complaints about Victorian state and local government departments and agencies.

Call (03) 9613 6222 or toll free 1800 806 314 (regional only) or visit  
→ [www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/about](http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/about)

## Victorian Trades Hall Council

The Victorian Trades Hall Council can link you to a union.

Call (03) 9659 3511 or visit  
→ [www.vthc.org.au](http://www.vthc.org.au)

## WorkSafe Victoria

WorkSafe Victoria is a government organisation which offers information, advice and help about insurance protection, work-related injury claims, returning to work and safety in the workplace.

Call their advisory service on 1800 136 089 or visit  
→ [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au)

# Group education and information programs

## **SMARTS programs: Meter Smarts, Carb Smarts, Foot Smarts**

The SMARTS programs are 2 and 3 hour group workshops that provide information and practical tips for people living with type 2 diabetes.

For more information visit  
→ [www.diabetesvic.org.au](http://www.diabetesvic.org.au) or to book, call 1300 136 588.

## **Type 2 diabetes**

DESMOND is a one day workshop where people can learn practical skills to manage their type 2 diabetes including; checking their blood glucose levels, making healthy food choices, physical activity and exercise, managing diabetes complications, setting goals and creating an action plan.

Call 1300 136 588 or visit  
→ [diabetesvic.org.au/desmond](http://diabetesvic.org.au/desmond)

## **Type 1 diabetes**

Oz DAFNE (Dose Adjustment for Normal Eating) is a group program designed for adults with type 1 diabetes. It is a way of managing type 1 diabetes by working out how much insulin you need for what you want to eat.

Call (03) 9667 1719 or visit  
→ [www.diabetesvic.org.au/DAFNE](http://www.diabetesvic.org.au/DAFNE)



# Hypoglycaemia

## Emergency Information

1

### Spot the symptoms

Hypoglycaemia is a blood glucose level that falls below 4 mmol/L and can only occur if a person is on certain medications and/or insulin.

#### Early signs

Sweating  
Weakness  
Pale skin  
Trembling  
Dizziness  
Heart palpitations  
Hunger

#### Late signs

Confusion  
Drowsiness  
Changes in mood/behaviour  
Lack of co-ordination  
Slurred speech  
Loss of consciousness  
Seizures

2

### Treat quickly

If the person is conscious give glucose or 15g of sugar immediately;

e.g. one of the following:

- 6–7 jelly beans
- ½ can regular soft drink (not diet soft drink)
- 3 teaspoons of sugar or honey dissolved in water
- Glucose tablets equivalent to 15g of carbohydrate (approximately 3)

### 3

## Emergency action

You might need to encourage the person to eat or drink but if they are unable to swallow do not give drink or food. Symptoms should improve in 10–15 minutes. Stay with the person and ask them to re-check their blood glucose after 15 minutes.

Once the blood glucose level is above 4 mmol/L and the person feels better, he/she can go back to work.

It may be necessary to follow up with a long acting carbohydrate snack such as dry biscuits, a piece of fruit or a sandwich.

If the person is too drowsy to eat or drink, has a seizure or is unconscious, get emergency help!

Turn the person onto their left side and do not give fluid or food.

Call 000 for an ambulance and state that it is a 'Diabetes Emergency'.

Stay with him/her.



# Know your rights as a person with diabetes in the workplace.

