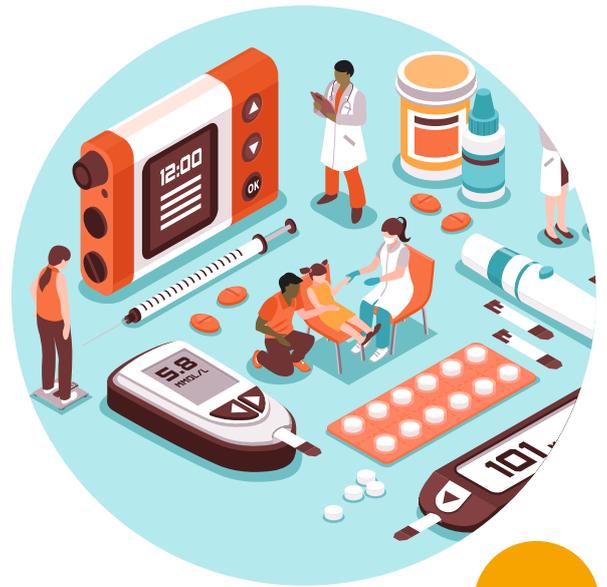


Diabetes and work...



The number of adults living with diabetes has more than tripled over the past 20 years.

There are some staggering global figures around the prevalence of diabetes:

- Approximately 463million adults (20-79 years) were living with diabetes in 2019, half of them undiagnosed, and by 2045 this is predicted to rise to 700million
- Health-related expenditure on diabetes in 2019 was at least 760 billion USD, and this does not take into account the impact on companies or social costs
- The World Health Organization estimates that diabetes was the seventh leading cause of death in 2016.

Diabetes can affect every aspect of someone's life. Being supportive with the management of diabetes at work recognises that employees do not leave their condition at the door – it is a great example of a Safe@Work-Safe@Home approach.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic disease, of which there are two main types:

Type 1

Type 1 develops when the body's immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas; the cause of this is unknown.

Type 2

Type 2 is the most common type, which develops when the body doesn't make enough insulin or the insulin the body is making is not being used properly. Many cases of type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed by maintaining a healthy weight, eating well and being active. Reducing the amount of salt, sugar, processed foods and alcohol can help, as can eating healthier snacks and adding more fruit and vegetables to your diet.

Signs and symptoms of diabetes

- **Being very thirsty**
- **Urinating more frequently, especially at night**
- **Genital itching or frequent thrush**
- **Feeling more tired than usual**
- **Unexplained weight loss and muscle loss**
- **Poor wound healing**
- **Blurred vision.**





The impact of diabetes in the workplace

Diabetes does not necessarily impact someone's ability at work, although it can affect productivity, through effects on eyesight, foot sensation and concentration, and can result in time off. Although its effects may not be consistent, a worker with diabetes may at some stage need guidance or workplace adjustments.

There is a need to increase awareness among managers of the economic benefits, such as reduced sickness absence, of supporting employees to manage their disease effectively. Employees may need individual assessments and tailored support. For example, they may need a risk assessment for performing safety-critical tasks such as driving or using heavy machinery, because they are at risk of hypoglycaemia, which can cause sudden incapacity, and blurred vision because of high blood sugar.

Ensuring medical fitness to drive is an important safety measure for people with diabetes and is a prerequisite for a driving licence in many countries. However, there is a wide variation between different countries in the statutory requirements and policies used to regulate and assess drivers with diabetes.

Making reasonable adjustments

Supporting workers with diabetes is both the right thing to do and a smart business decision. In many countries, it will fall under legislation such as the Equality Act in the UK and the Disabilities Act in the US.

Managing diabetes in the workplace through reasonable adjustments can include:

1. Provision for testing, which is essential for the management of diabetes, in a private and hygienic area
2. Awareness-raising to ensure that all employees know the symptoms of hypoglycaemia and how to help a colleague in this situation
3. Encouraging communication with employees around self-care, prevention, disease management and treatment
4. Individual assessments for people with diabetes; some safety-critical jobs may have requirements that are difficult to meet for someone with diabetes, but diabetics should not face a blanket exclusion
5. Regular eye tests to ensure that all employees are fit to perform their duties
6. Recognition that diabetes may affect the emotional wellbeing of an individual (also that stress can affect blood sugar control), and the provision of support when needed, through a doctor or a counsellor

7. Implementing health initiatives – although many factors lead to the development of diabetes, the major controllable risk factors are body weight and physical activity. Understanding the profile of your workforce can help you design a holistic approach to health and wellness. A health initiative like the “One Less Challenge” could have a significant impact – one less spoonful of sugar in a drink over six drinks a day equates to 1kg less sugar a month and 12kg less sugar a year.

If companies work alongside health care professionals and individuals, we could turn the tide on the diabetes epidemic and save lives.

- Thanks to the Diabetes Safety Organisation for its help with this briefing paper <https://diabetessafety.org>
- The International Diabetes Federation has a wide range of useful resources www.idf.org

RoSPA and L'Oréal enjoy a long-term partnership based on shared values to ensure key safety and health messages spread beyond the workplace. L'Oréal sponsors the RoSPA Safe@Work-Safe@Home Award, which recognises organisations that demonstrate excellence and innovation in promoting safety outside of the workplace, in the home and in local communities.

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