Practical Tips for Helping Your Child with Diabetes Succeed in School

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You and Your Child’s Rights

- Your child has the right to a free, appropriate public education without discrimination.
- You have the right to have your child assessed for an IEP and/or Section 504.
- You have the right to have a meeting to discuss with school personnel your child’s needs. At this meeting you have a right to bring an advocate, attorney and/or experts in your child’s diabetes management.
- You have the right to have a 504 plan developed for your child that specifically states your child’s needs and services and accommodations required to meet those needs.
- You have the right to be notified of any proposed changes to your child’s plan of care and to approve those changes.

Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick!

- The Big Stick: A 504 Plan (or IEP)

What is a 504 Plan?

- It is a civil rights law.
- It protects your child against discrimination.
- It assures your child has the appropriate accommodations to insure their diabetes is managed at school appropriately.
- It is good for the school life of your child (through college).
- The college board requests a 504 plan be in place to allow for extended time (up to 50% longer) for taking the SAT or ACT.
- It is insurance for you that your child’s needs are met. If a school fails to follow a 504 they risk losing federal funds.

Who Qualifies for a 504?

- To be eligible for protection under 504 a child must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Anatomical loss of the endocrine system is included under this definition. This means ALL children with type 1 diabetes qualify for a 504 plan!

How do you go about getting a 504?

- Every school should have a staff member responsible for coordinating 504 plans.
- Contact your child’s school and find out who this person is.
- Contact the 504 coordinator and fill out the necessary paperwork to get the process started.
- A 504 meeting will be scheduled to discuss needed accommodations.
What Should I Include in my Child’s 504 Plan?

• The general idea of a 504 plan is to specify specific accommodations that will allow your child to function as successfully and normally as possible in school.
• Keeping the 504 as succinct as possible will help assure it is followed.
• Avoid long explanations and details.

What to Include in the 504 Plan

• Reasonable accommodations may include but are not limited to:
  1. Trained staff members for recognition and treatment of hypoglycemia, insulin administration, glucagon administration, and carbohydrate counting.
  2. Self administration of blood glucose monitoring IN THE CLASSROOM.
  3. Allowing the child to treat hypoglycemia and hyperglycemia in any location at school when necessary. This includes allowing child to eat snacks in the classroom.

What To Include in the 504 Plan Cont’d

  4. Use of restroom at any time
  5. Access to water
  6. Eating and drinking whenever and wherever necessary
  7. To be allowed to be absent or tardy without penalty
  8. Extended time for testing (this also goes for College Board SAT testing)
  9. Plans regarding access to supplies in the event of an emergency or school lock down
10. Full participation in all sports and extracurricular activities and field trips with appropriate supervision provided by the school.

What Do I Do If My Child’s School Resists?

• Remind the school that this is illegal and that you have a strong case for legal action.
• Present a letter from your child’s doctor requesting a 504 plan be prepared for your child. Have the letter list the specific accommodations that are necessary to include in the 504 plan. It is difficult for a school to argue with the medical care or protocol your child’s doctor has clearly indicated for your child in writing.
• A letter or email defining your child’s rights and what actions you plan to take if they continue to resist often is all that is necessary.
• If school continues to resist – contact:
  • American Diabetes Association – www.diabetes.org They have staff attorneys that are trained in advocating for people with diabetes.
  • Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) they also have staff attorneys who are trained to deal with this issue
  • www.dredf.org
  • Office for Civil Rights (OCR) www.hhs.gov/ocr/
  • Be PERSISTENT!

The 504 Meeting

• Once a 504 is approved for your child the next step is to meet with school staff to determine what will go in the plan.
• If you suspect the school is not going to be cooperative bring the appropriate support people with you (for example an attorney, a representative from the ADA or DREDF, a CDE or a physician).
• If you suspect the school is not going to be cooperative bring along the appropriate documents available online. These documents are very persuasive. A letter from your child’s doctor requesting a 504 be prepared for the child is very effective.
Changes to the 504

- If changes occur during the school year that require changes to be made to the 504 plan contact the 504 coordinator.
- A meeting will be scheduled to discuss and implement these changes.
- Each year at the start of school you should meet and review the 504 plan and make changes as necessary. If possible schedule this meeting sometime during week before school starts.

What is an IEP?

- An IEP stands for Individualized Education Program.
- It is for children who have the added burden of their disability interfering with their educational performance.
- Some children (but not all) with diabetes qualify for an IEP.
- If you believe your child qualifies talk to the IEP coordinator at your child’s school.

School Issues

- Classroom vs. Nurse’s Office:
  - Whatever can be done in classroom should be allowed - to avoid missing class time.
  - Especially important to allow blood glucose testing and eating of snacks in classroom.

Food Issues

- School Lunches:
  - If your child is unable to do own carb counting - parents should provide carb counts on cold lunches brought from home
  - Hot lunches – many schools provide nutritional counts on hot lunch food items
  - Carb Counting can be taught to school staff. Provide school with good carb counting book to help calculate carb count in foods (i.e. Calorie King)

- Parents should provide snacks for classroom
  - Make sure snacks have a set amount of carbohydrate (i.e. all snacks 15 grams).
  - Provide low blood sugar supplies (i.e. glucose tabs and juice)
  - Make sure child has easy access to their food supply in classroom and is able to access it at any time.
  - Check on supply frequently and replace as necessary

- Elementary aged kids - consider sending snacks in tupperware type containers
- Junior High/High School - snacks will need to be provided in every classroom (including the gym)
- Provide low blood sugar supplies and snacks for child to carry in backpack - don’t forget kids can go low on school bus, playground, after school events, etc.
Food Issues

- Many parents ask what they should do about school parties
- Typically food at these parties are high in carbohydrate
- Ask to be informed about any special events at school and what will be served
- Consider attending the event if you are able so you can calculate the carbohydrate count
- If you are unable to attend - have your child call you to tell you what they are going to eat

Insulin

- Orders from child’s doctor should include instructions on insulin dose
- Best practice is to use Insulin to Carbohydrate ratios or I/C Ratio - This is the amount of carbohydrate grams per 1 unit of insulin

Blood Glucose Monitoring

- Testing in the Classroom – A MUST.
  - Newer meters take short period of time
  - Very little blood involved
  - Child should not be walking to nurse’s office when possibly low
  - Child should not have to miss class time

Insulin

- Whether your child is on a pump or injection - make sure the school nurse, teachers, and other staff see what your child will use
- If insulin is to be administered by school nurse or other staff member ask to be present for training
- Insulin can be administered in the classroom unless your child would rather administer it in private

Blood Glucose Monitoring

- Irritability, poor attention, sleepiness, are all signs of abnormal blood glucose levels.
- Teach this to teachers!
Hypoglycemia

- In school may be caused by too little food, exercise or PE, missed meal or snack, or too much insulin.
- Teach all people who are around your child the signs and symptoms YOUR child typically exhibits. This includes people such as teachers, yard duty staff, lunch staff, bus drivers, PE aids, teacher’s aids, administration staff, health aide, and school nurse.

Hypoglycemia

- For mild to moderate hypoglycemia teach the staff what to do.
- Make sure they understand that it takes time for a blood sugar to return to normal and to NOT OVERTREAT.
- For elementary aged kids - consider providing low supplies to yard duty staff.
- Pre-lunch is most likely time for a low - make sure your child can get to lunch in a timely manner.
- Post PE another likely time to have hypoglycemia - may want to schedule PE class after lunch or first thing in morning instead of before lunch.

Hypoglycemia

- Emergency Treatment
  - Make sure several staff members at school know how to administer Glucagon.
  - If teachers are willing - teach them!
  - Glucagon given for unconsciousness and/or seizures caused by hypoglycemia ONLY
  - Consider keeping one glucagon at nurse’s office and another in child’s classroom or backpack
  - Keep old expired glucagon kits to use for training.

PE and Exercise

- Blood Glucose Goals for Exercise:
  - Example plan (Please ask your doctor for best plan for your child):
    - <100 mg/dL = 2 carb exchanges and 2 protein exchanges. No insulin
    - 100-140 mg/dL = 1 carb exchange and 1 protein exchange. No insulin
    - 140-240 mg/dL = No snack necessary
    - <80 or >240 mg/dL = DO NOT EXERCISE

PE and Exercise

- When NOT to exercise:
  - When hypoglycemic
  - When blood glucose levels are elevated, >240 mg/dL (or per doctor’s instructions)
  - High blood glucose levels occur when not enough insulin is present – When cells do not receive glucose the liver will secrete more glucose and will actually cause a rise in glucose levels in the absence of insulin.

PE and Exercise

- Prevention of lows during and after exercising:
  - Follow snack plan
  - Test blood glucose levels when symptoms of lows present, after 1 hour of exercise, and following exercise session.
  - Have rapid acting carbohydrates readily available
  - Be aware lows can occur up to 24 hours after exercise
Ketone Testing

What are ketones?

Ketones are the by-products of when your body uses fat for energy. They can occur for a variety of reasons. Most typically in the diabetic they occur from an absence of insulin which results in the body using fat instead of glucose for energy.

Ketone Testing

Ketone testing in the school:

- As per physician’s instructions
- Ketone testing should be done if blood glucose is not reducing after a bolus dose of insulin
- Ketone testing should be done when child is ill or complains of nausea

Ketone Testing

Blood or Urine Testing can be used

- For mild ketones – increased fluids and increased insulin are necessary
- For moderate – severe ketones – child needs to be under the care of a physician
- For severe ketones or symptoms of DKA – emergency situation – child must go to hospital

Ketone Testing

Treatment of Ketones:

- For mild ketones – increased fluids and increased insulin are necessary
- For moderate – severe ketones – child needs to be under the care of a physician
- For severe ketones or symptoms of DKA – emergency situation – child must go to hospital

Special Situations in the School

Assemblies and Field Trips:

- Require extra precautions to be taken.
- Blood glucose testing supplies, insulin, and snacks should be available
- Someone trained in diabetes management must be available for all field trips

Special Situations in the School

Substitute teachers –

- If possible the school nurse should help educate the substitute teacher about diabetes management
- The 504 plan can include information on substitute teachers – i.e., contacting parents when there is going to be a substitute, providing a short, simple form for the substitute to read on diabetes care, information on what to do in emergency
Special Situations at School

Special Events:

- When special events occur at school – excitement and extra activity can lead to the development of hypoglycemia.
- Ask to be informed of all special events and try to be there if possible
- If unable to be there - be available by phone

Elementary School - Tips

- Tupperware snack boxes kept where child can reach
- Consider talking about diabetes to whole class at beginning of year
- Your child's friends are best source for determining when something is wrong
- Be available by phone and consider sending cell phone to school with your child if one not available in classroom
- Train yard duties/playground staff, lunch staff and others in frequent contact with your child
- Consider meeting with school staff before start of school year, bring your child so they know who they are and talk about low blood sugars and its treatment

Junior High and High School Tips

- Snacks and low supplies for every classroom
- Schedule PE class first thing in morning or after lunch
- Consider putting in 504 accommodations such as turning in work late when having diabetes difficulties, extra time for testing when blood sugars off, pass for using restroom, and permission to use cell phone for diabetes questions.
- Keep snacks and low supply in your child's backpack.
- Email teachers occasionally to check on supplies in classroom
- Make sure teachers understand the learning consequences of blood sugars out of range and be prepared to provide tutoring or extra help for your child as needed
- Apply for extra time for college board tests
- Be aware your child may not want others to know

College

- Meet with disability staff at college to discuss special needs
- 504 plan can be used at many colleges
- Request your child has priority scheduling so can schedule classes when blood sugars are typically optimum.
- If child going to live on campus - make sure someone trains dorm resident advisors, security staff (or whichever is a first responder) as well as roommates on emergency treatment.
- Make sure your child is well stocked with supplies and you may need to keep tabs on this.
- Consider finding an endocrinologist near campus
- Look into pharmacies, medical care, and hospitals near campus and transfer prescriptions if necessary.

Resources

- Many excellent resources available for teachers and others at the school:
- My email: diabetesconsultant@gmail.com