

DIABETES AT WORK

The most important part of handling diabetes in the workplace is preparation. You want to think about and prepare for scenarios and situations in advance of having a real need.

Here are a few ideas that will help keep you safe and confident at work:

- Create high and low kits in case of emergencies.
- Identify a diabetes safe person.
- Identify a diabetes safe place.
- Keep extra diabetes medical supplies handy.

High blood sugar at work

Take a calm approach to thinking through the steps necessary to help lower your blood sugar. The first priority is safety and asking for help if you need it. (Sharing your struggle with your safe person might be a good idea.) The next step is dosing insulin and hydration. Drink lots of water. Consider taking a walk. If you are unable to walk, you need to seek medical attention, as you may need professional help handling this situation.

Low blood sugar at work

In this instance, you need to immediately use the fast acting carbohydrate in your low kit to treat the low blood sugar. Once you have consumed carbohydrates, consider reaching out to your diabetes safe person. It is important to give yourself a little time to recover from the low. Use your diabetes safe place and avoid having to make decisions, engage in conversation, send emails, or do anything that might potentially embarrass you for about 10-15 minutes or until you feel better.

Diabetes disclosure

Unless your employer has a legitimate reason to believe that your diabetes is affecting your performance, you cannot be asked about your diabetes. However, you may want to consider sharing about your diabetes with your employer before an emergency situation arises and before you are seen taking care of your diabetes at work. It is important to communicate (in both actions and in words) that you are educated about your diabetes, capable of managing the condition, and that diabetes will not affect your job performance.

The hard facts

Having diabetes means you have to work both harder and smarter in your career than people without diabetes. Don't ever use diabetes as a crutch. We all have tough diabetes days, but in those tough days there is a time and a place to communicate about your feelings and struggles. Practice appropriate restraint. If you feel unwell and are disturbing others, you need to take a sick day and go home. It is not ok to put your head on your desk or to disrupt the workplace. If you are struggling with a high or low, you need to treat the situation and carry on with your work. Remember, you are always in the process of gaining or losing your employer's trust. Multiple dramatic diabetes situations will diminish that trust and make others question your abilities.

Take a leadership perspective. Show that you are in charge of your diabetes, you are capable, and you are prepared.

Your rights

You do have certain rights under the Americans With Disabilities Act that protect you.

- You have the right to employment, regardless of your disease.
- You have the right to a clean workplace.
- You have the right to safely manage your diabetes.
- You have a right to privacy about your condition.

Make sure to know your rights and if they are violated, seek appropriate help.