



For people with diabetes in the workplace,
the bottom line is health first

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The workplace can be difficult for people with diabetes who must manage their diets, watch blood sugar levels and try to keep stress under control—as well as do their jobs. In one study, employees reported having to adapt their diabetes management in order to keep up with their jobs, including running their blood glucose levels higher than normal when work priorities overwhelmed them. Whether you're starting a new job or deciding to turn over a new leaf at your old one, here are some tips to help you focus on your health.

Priorities

It goes without saying that most of us need—and want—to make a living and use our skills in the workplace. Even so, your health should remain your chief priority.

Consider telling your manager about your diabetes.

No law says you have to tell your employer, but acquainting your boss with the impact that diabetes has on your life means that she or he can support you should you need help, especially in case of emergencies. Also, studies have shown that people with diabetes miss work two to three times more than people without diabetes, so telling your boss will help make him or her aware of this. Your manager may even be open to arranging a schedule for you that includes more time working from home.

Inform your co-workers.

If you are comfortable sharing with your coworkers, you may find they can be an important source of support. Other people in your workplace may also have diabetes or other issues they have to manage. Further, let a work friend know where your diabetes supplies are and what to do in case of an emergency—your manager may not always be nearby to help.

Manage your stress.

Chronic stress can affect metabolic activity by releasing hormones that can affect blood sugar levels, resulting in hyperglycemia. Some ways to control stress on the job include keeping photos of loved ones near you, doing deep breathing exercises, and—whenever possible—moving physically. Walk around the block or even around the office for ten minutes—it can make a world of difference.



Doing Shift Work

Jobs in occupations including health care, policework and overnight security can involve working in shifts, which does present special challenges to those who have diabetes. **Working overnight or rotating shifts can upset your body's circadian rhythm** (or natural body clock), which can in turn affect blood sugar levels and potentially increase insulin resistance. Working nights can also affect the regular eating habits you've established to keep your blood glucose balanced. And if the shift work you're doing includes hard, regular physical activity, you need to closely monitor your blood sugar to make sure it doesn't drop too low. (Keep a fast-acting sugar source handy.) Finally, keep taking medications on a consistent basis. If necessary, talk to your doctor to find a medication scheduling plan that will work for you.



Eating Healthy at Work

One of the biggest issues that people with diabetes face at work is eating healthily and on a regular schedule. A few tips:



Pack your own lunch whenever possible. The focus should be on healthy, protein-filled foods—leafy salads, fruit, lean meat or chicken, peanut butter, hummus or perhaps a whole grain bagel.



Have your water bottle with you and drink it instead of soda or juice. Not only can you stay hydrated with fresh water, but the trip to the water cooler will give you a chance to get up and moving.



Be sure to bring healthy snacks. Snacking regularly will keep your blood sugar levels in the right range. And if a meeting happens when you need your snack, take both the snack and the meeting—it is your right to keep your diabetes under control in this way.



Be cautious around sugary snacks. In many offices, people often bring in baked goods or candy to share. There's no problem with having a sweet snack every now and then, but be aware of how much you're eating, especially when you're stressed.

Sources: <https://diabetes.org/advocacy/your-rights-on-the-job> | <https://hbr.org/2022/03/how-to-manage-your-diabetes-in-the-office> | <https://diabetes.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Employment%20Considerations%20for%20People%20Who%20Have%20Diabetes%20Cornell%20University%20Paper.pdf> | <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/features/diabetes-shift-work.html> | <https://www.chop.edu/pages/managing-diabetes-work> | <https://www.medtronicdiabetes.com/about-diabetes/daily-life/work-life-with-diabetes> | <https://beyondtype1.org/hyperglycemia-diabetes-work-emergencies/>

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