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Knowledge Hub

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FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Diabetes Awareness in Care Settings

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 056

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Introduction

Diabetes is a long-term condition that affects the body's ability to regulate the level of glucose (sugar) in the blood. It is common among people receiving health and social care, and effective everyday support can help individuals manage their condition safely while maintaining independence and quality of life.

The two main types are **Type 1 diabetes** and **Type 2 diabetes**. Although they have different causes and may be managed differently, both require appropriate monitoring and individualised care. Some people manage their diabetes through diet and lifestyle measures, while others may require tablets, injectable medicines or insulin.

Care staff play an important role in supporting individuals with diabetes by following their care plans, encouraging healthy daily routines, observing for changes in their condition and reporting concerns promptly.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding diabetes awareness helps care staff to:

- Understand the basic differences between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.
- Support individuals according to their personal diabetes care plan.
- Recognise possible signs of low blood glucose (**hypoglycaemia**).
- Recognise possible signs of high blood glucose (**hyperglycaemia**).
- Support appropriate nutrition, hydration and healthy daily routines.
- Understand the importance of medication and blood glucose monitoring where these form part of the individual's care plan.
- Recognise changes in health or behaviour and report concerns promptly.
- Promote independence, dignity and person-centred care.

Key Message

Every person's diabetes is different. Care staff should never make assumptions about an individual's diet, medication or blood glucose management. By following the person's care plan, recognising changes promptly and working within their training and competence, care staff can help individuals manage their diabetes safely while maintaining their independence, dignity and wellbeing.

Understanding Diabetes

Diabetes occurs when the level of glucose in the blood becomes too high because the body cannot produce enough insulin, cannot use insulin effectively, or both. Insulin is a hormone that helps glucose move from the bloodstream into the body's cells, where it can be used for energy.

In **Type 1 diabetes**, the body does not produce insulin, so insulin treatment is required. In **Type 2 diabetes**, the body may not produce enough insulin or may not use it effectively. Treatment varies between individuals and may include lifestyle changes, tablets, other medicines or insulin.

Care staff do not need to diagnose or independently manage diabetes, but they should understand how the condition may affect the individuals they support and follow each person's individual care plan.

Recognising Changes in Blood Glucose

Care staff should be aware of possible signs that an individual's blood glucose may be too low or too high.

Low Blood Glucose – Hypoglycaemia

Possible signs can include:

- Sweating, shaking or trembling.
- Feeling hungry.
- Dizziness or weakness.
- Irritability, anxiety or changes in behaviour.
- Difficulty concentrating or confusion.
- Drowsiness or reduced responsiveness.

High Blood Glucose – Hyperglycaemia

Possible signs can include:

- Increased thirst.
- Passing urine more frequently.
- Tiredness or weakness.
- Blurred vision.
- Dry mouth.
- Feeling generally unwell.

Symptoms can vary between individuals, which is why knowing the person's usual presentation and following their diabetes care plan is important.

Remember

A significant change in blood glucose can become serious. If an individual with diabetes becomes confused, very drowsy, loses consciousness, has a seizure or appears seriously unwell, care staff should follow the individual's emergency care plan and organisational procedures and obtain urgent medical assistance where required.

Never give insulin, alter medication or make changes to an individual's diabetes treatment unless you are appropriately trained, authorised and acting in accordance with their agreed care plan.

Professional Responsibilities

Care staff play an important role in supporting individuals living with diabetes. Safe support involves following the individual's care plan, recognising changes in their usual health or behaviour and understanding when concerns need to be reported or escalated.

As a care professional, you should always:

- Treat every individual with dignity, respect and compassion.
- Follow the individual's diabetes care plan and agreed support arrangements.
- Support appropriate food and fluid intake in accordance with the person's individual needs and care plan.
- Be aware of the individual's usual signs of low or high blood glucose where these are known.
- Support blood glucose monitoring only if appropriately trained, competent and authorised to do so.
- Administer insulin or other diabetes medication only if appropriately trained, competent and authorised.
- Never alter insulin doses, medication or treatment independently.
- Record relevant observations and actions accurately.
- Report changes or concerns promptly and follow agreed escalation procedures.
- Encourage individuals to participate in managing their diabetes and maintain independence wherever possible.

When to Raise Concerns

Concerns should be reported promptly if:

- The individual develops symptoms of possible **hypoglycaemia or hyperglycaemia**.
- Blood glucose readings are outside the individual's agreed target or action range.
- There is a significant change in eating or drinking.
- The individual is repeatedly refusing or unable to take prescribed diabetes medication.
- They develop vomiting, diarrhoea or another illness that may affect their diabetes management.
- A wound, blister, redness or other problem develops on the feet or skin.
- There is a noticeable change in alertness, behaviour or general wellbeing.
- You are uncertain about any aspect of the individual's diabetes care.

If the individual becomes **unconscious, has a seizure, is severely confused or appears seriously unwell**, follow their emergency care plan and organisational procedures and seek urgent medical assistance.

Good Practice Reminder

Diabetes management is individual to each person. Care staff should never assume that everyone with diabetes requires the same diet, medication or treatment.

By following the individual's care plan, recognising changes early, maintaining accurate records and escalating concerns appropriately, care staff can help support safe diabetes management while promoting dignity, independence and person-centred care.

Summary

Diabetes is a long-term condition that requires individualised care and support. Understanding the basic principles of diabetes helps care staff recognise changes that may indicate low or high blood glucose and respond appropriately in accordance with the individual's care plan.

Care staff play an important role in supporting healthy daily routines, observing changes in wellbeing, maintaining accurate records and reporting concerns promptly. Staff should always work within their training and competence and should never independently alter an individual's insulin, medication or diabetes treatment.

Diabetes Awareness Checklist

✓ Follow the individual's diabetes care plan and agreed support arrangements.

✓ Be aware of the individual's usual signs of low or high blood glucose.

✓ Support appropriate nutrition and hydration according to individual needs.

✓ Support blood glucose monitoring only when trained, competent and authorised.

✓ Administer insulin or diabetes medication only when trained, competent and authorised.

✓ Never independently change medication, insulin doses or treatment.

✓ Observe for changes in eating, drinking, behaviour and general wellbeing.

✓ Record relevant observations accurately and report concerns promptly.

✓ Encourage independence and involve the individual in their care wherever possible.

Further Information

For further guidance on diabetes, visit:

NHS – Diabetes
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetes/

Diabetes UK
https://www.diabetes.org.uk

NICE – Diabetes Guidance
https://www.nice.org.uk

Care Quality Commission (CQC)
https://www.cqc.org.uk

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- Resource 008 – Encouraging Good Nutrition in Care Settings
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