

First Aid for Diabetes



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The total number of people living with diabetes in Ireland is estimated to be 225,840 (www.diabetes.ie). In 2017 there were 564 deaths from diabetes in Ireland, with 90% of these in people over 65 years of age. Therefore it is important to know how to help a diabetic whose life is in danger (**Central Statistics Office**).

Read this article on first aid for diabetes to learn how you can identify and treat someone who needs your help.

What is Diabetes?

In someone without diabetes their body will automatically keep their blood sugar exactly at the right level. What happens is; after a meal containing carbohydrates, sugar is absorbed into the blood stream very quickly. The level of sugar in your blood must not get too low or high. The pancreas produces two hormones, insulin and glucagon, to ensure that the blood sugar is always well controlled no matter how much is eaten and how much you exercise.

Diabetes is a condition caused by a shortage of insulin. The pancreas makes too little insulin to allow all the sugar in your blood to get into your muscle and other cells to produce energy. If sugar can't get into the cells to be used, it builds up in the bloodstream causing high blood sugar (glucose) levels. If someone's body has problems with insulin production, they will develop diabetes. There are two

different categories of diabetes; Type 1 diabetes and Type 2 diabetes.

Type 1 Diabetes



This usually develops early in life and is the most common type of diabetes in children. It occurs when the body is unable to produce any insulin. Type 1 diabetes is always treated with insulin injections, or by using an insulin pump.

The prevalence of Type 1 Diabetes is on the rise. People with type 1 diabetes account for approximately 20,000 of the total diabetes population in Ireland, that is 10-15% of the population of people living with diabetes. **Diabetes Ireland** estimate that there are 2,750 people under 16 years of age living with Type 1 diabetes in Ireland .

Type 2 Diabetes

This tends to develop later in life and comes on slowly. Type 2 diabetes is much more widespread and is often linked to obesity. It develops when the body is unable to make enough insulin, or when it produces insulin, but this does not work properly (known as insulin resistance). Type 2 diabetes can sometimes be controlled with a combination of diet and exercise but often requires oral medications and/or insulin injections.

According to a Healthy Ireland survey, 854,165 adults over 40 in the Republic of Ireland are at increased risk of developing (or have) Type 2 diabetes. More alarmingly, there are a further 304,382 in the 30 - 39 year age group that are

overweight and not taking the weekly 150 minutes recommended physical activity, leaving them at an increased risk of chronic ill-health. This means that there are 1,158,547 adults in Ireland that need to consider making changes to their daily behaviours in terms of eating healthily and being more active (health.gov.ie).

First Aid for Diabetes

First aid treatment for diabetes is more likely to be necessary for low blood glucose (sugar) levels than high. This is because high blood sugar levels usually build over a few days or weeks, whereas low levels can come on very fast.

Low Blood Sugar/Hypoglycaemia

Blood glucose (sugar) levels can drop very fast if someone who is diabetic has skipped a meal, taken a lot of exercise, if they are ill, or took too much insulin. If this is not treated quickly, they can rapidly start to lose consciousness and fall into a diabetic coma. This can be fatal.

Signs and symptoms

- Behaving unusually
- Can be aggressive
- May appear slightly confused or drunk
- Might have shallow and rapid breathing
- May have a strong and fast pulse
- Could be pale, cold, shaky and sweaty
- They could have seizures

Treatment

- Sit the casualty down and give them a sugary drink (not diet), or glucose sweets.
- If they begin to feel better, give more drinks and some food, particularly biscuits or bread to sustain their blood sugar, a jam sandwich would be ideal.
- If they do not start to feel better within 10 minutes or if they begin to get worse then phone for an ambulance.

- If they lose consciousness but are breathing, put them into recovery position and then phone for an ambulance.
- Be prepared to give CPR if the casualty stops breathing.

Do not ever give a casualty insulin as this will further lower their blood sugar and could kill them. Do not attempt to give an unconscious casualty anything to eat or drink.

Even if the casualty seems to have recovered make sure they seek medical advice. This is especially important during the night, as insulin will continue to be active in the blood stream while they are asleep and therefore the blood sugar levels will continue to drop and they could go from sleeping to unconsciousness.

About us

Donegal Safety Services provides this information for guidance and it is not in any way a substitute for medical advice. Donegal Safety Services is not responsible or liable for any diagnosis made, or actions taken on this information.

It is highly advised that you attend a fully regulated First Aid course to understand what to do in a medical emergency. If you have any questions at all regarding any of our courses we would be delighted to hear from you. You can contact us by visiting our **contact us** page or by emailing us directly on info@donegalsafetyservices.ie

Hope you enjoyed this article on first aid for diabetes.