

Supporting Personal and Academic Growth in Students Living with Type 1 Diabetes

Ensuring that students with type 1 diabetes (T1D) have the resources and support they need in post-secondary education is **essential to their physical and mental well-being**. Many students benefit from **personalized academic and social accommodations** that reflect the realities of daily diabetes management. To better understand the importance of these accommodations and to appreciate the challenges faced by individuals with T1D, some common experiences and considerations for T1D management are outlined below.

Understanding Type 1 Diabetes

T1D is a **chronic autoimmune condition** where the immune system destroys insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. As a result, students with T1D **require 24/7 management in order to regulate blood glucose (BG) levels**, making as many as 180 additional daily health decisions. How students manage their T1D varies, and may include multiple daily injections or an insulin pump in combination with finger-prick checks and/or a continuous glucose monitor.

Students living with T1D experience:

- **Hyperglycaemia** (high blood glucose): Can cause difficulty concentrating, headaches, excessive thirst and frequent urination; untreated cases risk diabetic ketoacidosis.
- **Hypoglycaemia** (low blood glucose): Can cause confusion, difficulty concentrating, and low energy; must be treated immediately with quick acting carbohydrates to avoid unconsciousness and/or death.

Diabetes management varies from day to day and can be impacted by a number of factors including stress, illness and activity level, which can lead to increased high and/or low BG events. When recovering from high and low BG, it can take up to **45 minutes for the brain to regain full functioning**. To learn more, visit [Diabetes Canada](https://www.diabetes.ca).

Impacts of Managing T1D on Student Well-Being

For all students, the transition to post-secondary education is a significant milestone, requiring greater independence, the creation of new routines, and the management of academic demands. For students with T1D, these challenges are compounded by increasing responsibility to manage a chronic condition. This additional burden **increases the risk of diabetes burnout, anxiety, and unstable glucose levels**, which can negatively impact both physical and psychological well-being.

Accommodations and **diabetes awareness** are critical in supporting students throughout their post-secondary journey, allowing them to **focus on both their health and their academics** rather than feeling like they need to choose between them. By asking students with T1D how cultural, socioeconomic, or gender identity factors influence their diabetes management, accessibility offices can use an intersectional lens to customize supports to meet multifaceted needs.

How Accommodations Can Support Students with T1D

Management of T1D varies from student to student and it is essential to ensure that accommodations reflect individual student experiences rather than just the medical condition. When considering accommodation options, allowing students the space to explain their personal management and needs is key to supporting their personal and academic success.



“Every time I had to be in a testing environment, I was always nervous. What if something goes wrong and I can’t perform as well as I should? I needed to acknowledge that T1D impacts me. If I’m not functioning at full capacity, that has real repercussions and I deserve to take a break and take care of my health. Accommodations can definitely bring that piece of mind. They make students feel more comfortable to take that step and say ‘I do need to check my blood sugar’ or ‘it’s okay to treat a low’, which helps us feel more comfortable in our own skin.”

- Anastasia

Rights of a Student with T1D

Under the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#), a disability is defined as a severe or chronic mental or physical condition that may limit an individual’s ability to carry out everyday activities. The Government of Canada recognizes T1D as a [disability](#) due to its lifelong nature, the need for continuous blood glucose monitoring and insulin management, and the potential for acute and long-term health risks.

This legal recognition is especially significant in educational settings, as it affirms that students living with T1D are entitled to appropriate accommodations and protections. These safeguards exist to ensure that students are not placed in a position where they must choose between managing their health and fully participating in their academic responsibilities. Access to accommodations supports students’ right to equitable education while prioritizing their medical safety and well-being.

Whether or not a student with T1D chooses to personally identify as having a disability is entirely their decision and must always be respected. Regardless of self-identification, students living with T1D are entitled to legal protections and appropriate accommodations within educational settings.

Relevant Legal and Human Rights Frameworks

- [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) (1982):
 - Section 15 guarantees equality before and under the law and protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of disability, including in educational and healthcare contexts.
- [Canadian Human Rights Act](#):
 - As an extension of the Charter, this legislation ensures equal treatment and equal opportunity without discrimination on the basis of disability in federally regulated environments, reinforcing the obligation to provide reasonable accommodations.
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD):
 - This international human rights treaty, to which Canada is a signatory, affirms the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive, accessible education and healthcare, with the goal of enabling full participation without compromising health or dignity.
- [Accessible Canada Act](#):
 - Requires that persons with disabilities must be allowed to manage their condition in all public spaces, without barriers. This includes administering injections with insulin, checking blood sugar levels, eating food, and drinking juice or water.

Suggested Accommodations for Students Living with T1D

ACADEMIC	RATIONALE	GUIDING QUESTIONS
Access to medical supplies in class and during exams/tests	Allows you to safely treat high and low blood sugar events as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What diabetes technology and supplies does the student use every day at school?
Exam/testing breaks with stopped clock/additional time	Allows you time to recover from diabetes events without penalty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do BG changes affect the student's focus or ability to complete tasks? • What recovery time helps the student return to their normal functioning?
Access to food and water at all times	Ensures you can safely treat high and low blood glucose events as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What helps the student maintain stable blood glucose during the day (snacks, water, breaks)?
Proximity to medical devices (including cell phones) in class and during exams/tests	Most diabetes devices (including cell phones) are required to be kept within range of you in order to accurately monitor and manage their glucose levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tools or devices does the student use to check BG levels? • How close do these devices need to stay to the student in class or during assessments?
Note-taker access	Ensures access to material taught if you miss class time due to diabetes related events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might diabetes care or recovery time affect the student's participation or attendance? • What strategies have helped the student stay caught up when they miss class time?
Private exam room	Allows you the ability to manage technology and treat T1D events without disruption or added stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of testing environment supports the student's diabetes care most comfortably?
RESIDENTIAL & CAMPUS LIFE	RATIONALE	GUIDING QUESTIONS
Personal mini refrigerator in dorm	Ensures temperature-controlled insulin storage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the student currently store insulin and other supplies?
Priority dorm room location	Allows you to be near resident advisors, kitchens, medical support, and clear exits in case of emergencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What housing setup (proximity, access, or storage needs) supports the student's independence best? • Does the student prefer having a roommate or a private room for managing their diabetes?
Priority class scheduling	Allows you to schedule classes around daily T1D patterns and distances between classes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When during the day is glucose management more challenging for the student? • What scheduling options help them feel steady, focused, and successful in their classes?

***PLEASE NOTE:** This list of potential accommodations is **not exhaustive** and does **not represent a standard of care** within the T1D community. T1D management varies from individual to individual. Accommodation plans supporting T1D management should be developed on a **case-by-case basis**.