

Student Guide to Accommodations: Balancing Post-Secondary School and T1D

Understanding Your Needs as a Student With Type 1 Diabetes

If you are living with Type 1 Diabetes (T1D), you already know how much attention your blood glucose (BG) management requires. It is also important to recognize how much this daily work can affect your learning, especially during high and low blood glucose events.

High Blood Glucose (Hyperglycemia):

Highs can lead to headaches, trouble focusing, irritability, and increased thirst or urination. Bringing a high down can take time, especially when impacted by something beyond food and insulin (check out the [42 Factors](#) that can impact your blood glucose!).

Low Blood Glucose (Hypoglycemia):

Lows can cause confusion, shaky or low energy, and difficulty thinking clearly. It also requires immediate treatment. The after-effects of a low can temporarily affect focus and cognitive function and your brain may need up to 45 minutes to fully reset.

Highs and lows can happen for many reasons such as stress, sickness, hormones, physical activity, schedule changes, and occasionally, reasons we can't figure out. As a result, it is important to have supports in place to ensure you can prioritize your diabetes management and to allow your body the time it needs to stabilize.

Why Accommodations Matter for Students With T1D

Transitioning to college or university includes increased independence, new routines, and more academic and social pressure. For students with T1D, all of this happens while you are also:

- Making constant health decisions
- Treating unexpected highs and lows
- Managing technology (including pumps and CGM) and your supplies
- Navigating burnout, fatigue, or stress
- Balancing academic demands with physical needs

These added pressures can affect your learning, not because you are incapable, but because **diabetes is unpredictable and it affects both the brain and the body.**

Academic accommodations are not about lowering expectations. They are about ensuring you have the supports you need to balance your health with your academics instead of feeling like you need to choose between them.

Why You Deserve Accommodations

Your experience with T1D is shaped by many factors, including culture, financial access to supplies, mental health, gender identity, and community support. Your diabetes journey is unique, and your academic needs may differ from those of other students with T1D. As a student living with an invisible disability, you have the right to equitable access, understanding, and reasonable accommodations within educational settings, even when others cannot see the work required to manage your condition. [These rights](#) exist to ensure that you are not placed in a position where you must choose between managing your health and participating fully in your education.

In all public spaces, people with diabetes must be allowed to manage their condition without barriers. This includes administering insulin injections, checking blood glucose levels, eating food, and drinking juice or water as needed for medical safety. These protections are supported under Canadian accessibility and human rights legislation, including the [Accessible Canada Act](#).

Advocating for your needs is not asking for special treatment. It is exercising your right to a learning environment that recognizes the realities of diabetes management and actively supports your health, safety, 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

Deciding What Accommodations You Need

Part of self-advocating is preparing in advance. Before you meeting, decide which [accommodations](#) will best support your academic success and prepare to explain why. Use the chart on the following page to consider the accommodations that are typically available at post-secondary schools across Canada and how to prepare for your meeting to discuss them. Be sure to review your rights as a person living with a disability in the DHF [Transition Planner](#), and look up contact information for your school's accessibility programs in the DHF [Transition Guide](#).

Remember that T1D management varies greatly from person to person with your blood glucose levels being impacted by more than [42 factors](#), including stress, medication, activity levels, environment, and illness. Understanding how your T1D management is impacted these factors can help you reflect on your needs and to communicate them effectively with accessibility staff at your institution.

For additional support in advocating for accommodations, reach out to the staff team at DHF (info@diabeteshopefoundation.com) or consult with your health care team*.

*Before your meeting, make sure you have completed any supplemental documentation required by your school (i.e. [doctor's note](#) or form). Be sure to talk with your health care team about what accommodations you are requesting and why so they can support you.

Preparing for Your Accessibility Meeting

Requested Accommodation	Rationale	Think About...
Access to medical supplies in class and during exams/tests.	Allows you to safely treat high and low blood sugar events as needed.	How you can explain your use of diabetes technology to instructors so they understand it is medically necessary.
Exam/testing breaks with stopped clock/additional time.	Allows you time to recover from diabetes events without penalty.	How high or low blood glucose levels affect your focus, timing, or test performance, and how you can describe the recovery time or flexibility you need during exams.
Access to food and water at all times.	Ensures you can safely treat high and low blood glucose events as needed.	How you can identify school spaces where eating or drinking might be restricted (like labs or studios) and how you can communicate your need for consistent access to food or water in those spaces.
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.	How you can communicate that responding to device or phone alerts is part of your medical care (including what that care involves) and not a classroom distraction.
Access to note-taking.	Ensures access to material taught if you miss class time due to diabetes related events.	How you can explain why you may potentially miss class due to blood glucose changes and how you can best to access class notes or content if needed.
Private exam room.	Allows you the ability to manage technology and treat T1D events without disruption or added stress.	How you can explain that a private exam room can help you manage device alerts, supplies, or blood sugar treatments without feeling added stress or disrupting others.
Personal mini refrigerator in dorm.	Ensures temperature-controlled insulin storage.	How you can explain the importance of ensuring your insulin and supplies will be stored safely in your dorm environment.
Priority dorm room location.	Allows you to be near resident advisors, kitchens, medical support, and clear exits in case of emergencies.	How you can describe the housing setup that best supports your diabetes care, including access to kitchens, RAs, or nearby support.
Priority class scheduling.	Allows you to schedule classes around daily T1D patterns and distances between classes.	How you can explain your typical energy levels and glucose patterns throughout the day, and what class timing will ensure optimal learning for you.