

Children's Services: Information and Education

Growing with Diabetes

Introduction

Insulin dependent diabetes (type 1 diabetes) is one of the commonest chronic illnesses that affects children. For this kind of diabetes the only treatment is insulin and it has to be given by injection.

This leaflet is to tell you about:

- Insulin
- Blood tests
- HbA1c - what does it mean?
- Exercise



Insulin

Early days - when diabetes develops the insulin production by your body gradually gets less until after about 6-12 months when there is no insulin made. This means that at first you may not need a lot of insulin by injection to look after your diabetes. However after that 'honeymoon' time it is likely that you will need approximately 1 unit per kg per day, sometimes a little more. That means for someone weighing 25kg, it would be expected that they would require about 25 units of insulin per day. As you grow the amount of insulin you need to look after your diabetes will grow too. Most children will need a long acting insulin every day and also injections of short (or rapid) acting insulin with meals and large snacks.

Some children use an insulin pump which gives small amounts of insulin over 24 hours and helps you work out how much extra insulin is needed at meal times.

Blood tests

You will have your own kit to test your blood sugar. You will find it really useful to know what your blood sugar is – especially if you feel unwell; if you are exercising a lot; or if your insulin dose has changed.

Regular blood sugar testing is the best way of being in control of your diabetes.

HbA1c

This is the blood test done when you come to clinic. You will find that the diabetes team members will pay quite a lot of attention to this result. This is because it can give you an idea of how close to normal your blood glucose has been over the previous weeks.

The more your blood sugar is in the normal range the lower your HbA1c.

Why is this so important? Studies have shown that keeping near normal blood sugars allows better health through a lifetime of diabetes.

The target HbA1c in the children's diabetes clinic is less than 7.5%.

Exercise

Taking regular exercise is healthy for everyone.

Having diabetes will not stop you from doing most sports. Usually simple adjustment of what you are eating, or sometimes a change in insulin dose will keep your blood sugar stable. With time you will know best what happens to your blood sugar when you exercise. If you do a lot of exercise it is important to discuss it with the Diabetes Team so that your insulin schedule can be tailored to your needs. Low blood sugars can occur several hours after vigorous exercise, but with care can usually be avoided.