

Diabetes Safety in the Workplace

Reducing risks and increasing business performance

About this **document**

This document provides an overview of the risks that diabetes presents to workforce health and safety, compliance and productivity.

This document includes:

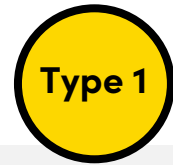
- 1. What are the risks of diabetes in the workplace?**
- 2. How common is diabetes in the workplace?**
- 3. What is the business impact of diabetes in the workplace?**
- 4. Implementing a Diabetes Safe approach**

This document uses UK and other diabetes data. For specific references, please contact The Diabetes Safety Organisation.

1. What are the risks of diabetes in the workplace?

What is **diabetes**?

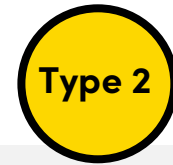
There are two main types of diabetes which share common symptoms. **95% of all persons with diabetes have Type 2 Diabetes.**



Auto-immune disease

Approx. 5% of all people with diabetes

Typically managed by medication (insulin)



Progressive condition caused by environmental factors, such as: diet, exercise, shift pattern, stress, genetics

Approx. 95% of all people with diabetes

Managed by diet, medication and/or insulin depending on progression



Slow healing



Extreme fatigue



Blurry vision



Sexual disorder



Increased thirst



Tingling or numbness in hands and feet



Frequent urination



Increased hunger

What is the **health impact of diabetes?**

Diabetes is a serious condition because of the internal damage it causes to the body, particularly to the heart, cardiovascular system and nervous system.



Twice as likely to have a **heart attack**



Twice as likely to have a **stroke**



One in three will experience **kidney issues**



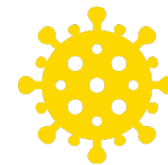
Leading cause of **blindness** in working age people



Increased **amputations**: a limb is lost to diabetes every 30 seconds



75% of men will suffer **erectile dysfunction**



People with Type 2 are twice as likely to die from **COVID-19**



9th leading cause of **death**. One death every seven seconds

Daily risks: **hypos and hypers**

Hypoglycaemia (hypos) – where blood sugars drop too low – and hyperglycaemia (hypers) – where blood sugars are too high – are serious and daily threats for people living with diabetes.

**Type 1 and 2
using insulin
and other
medication**



*Medication
lowers blood
sugar which
reduces risk of
health issues
e.g. heart
attack*



*Blood sugar
drops too
low e.g. take
a higher dose
before a long
shift*



Diabetes can be difficult to manage on a day-to-day basis as medication can be affected by a range of factors such as what a person eats, their stress levels, and their ability to test and take their medication at the right time.

**Undiagnosed or
poorly managed
diabetes**



*Blood sugar levels escalate as body
unable to process consumed sugars*



Mild-moderate hypo

- **Blurred vision**
- **Weak and shaky**
- **Fatigue/
sleepiness**
- **Impaired
awareness**
- **Impaired
concentration**

Severe hypo

- **Loss of balance or
coordination**
- **Dizziness**
- **Loss of
consciousness**
- **Seizures**
- **Coma**
- **Death**

Hyper

- **Impaired awareness**
- **Impaired concentration**
- **Impaired balance or coordination**
- **Lack of sensation in feet**

What are the **business risks from diabetes?**

Diabetes creates safety, compliance and productivity risks for businesses, both from short term hypo/hyper risks and longer-term progression of the disease.

1. Safety

Hypos and hypers can cause accidents to employees and others, including the public.

Hypos/hypers can lead to:

- **Loss of control of machinery and equipment**
- **Driving accidents**
- **Falls**
- **Traumatic injury**

2. Compliance

Diabetes creates legal obligations such as:

- **Health and Safety laws:** employers have a duty to protect against injury and ill-health
- **Equality and discrimination laws:** diabetes can be classed as a disability
- **Driving regulations:** e.g. DVLA requirements for testing and holding a licence

3. Productivity

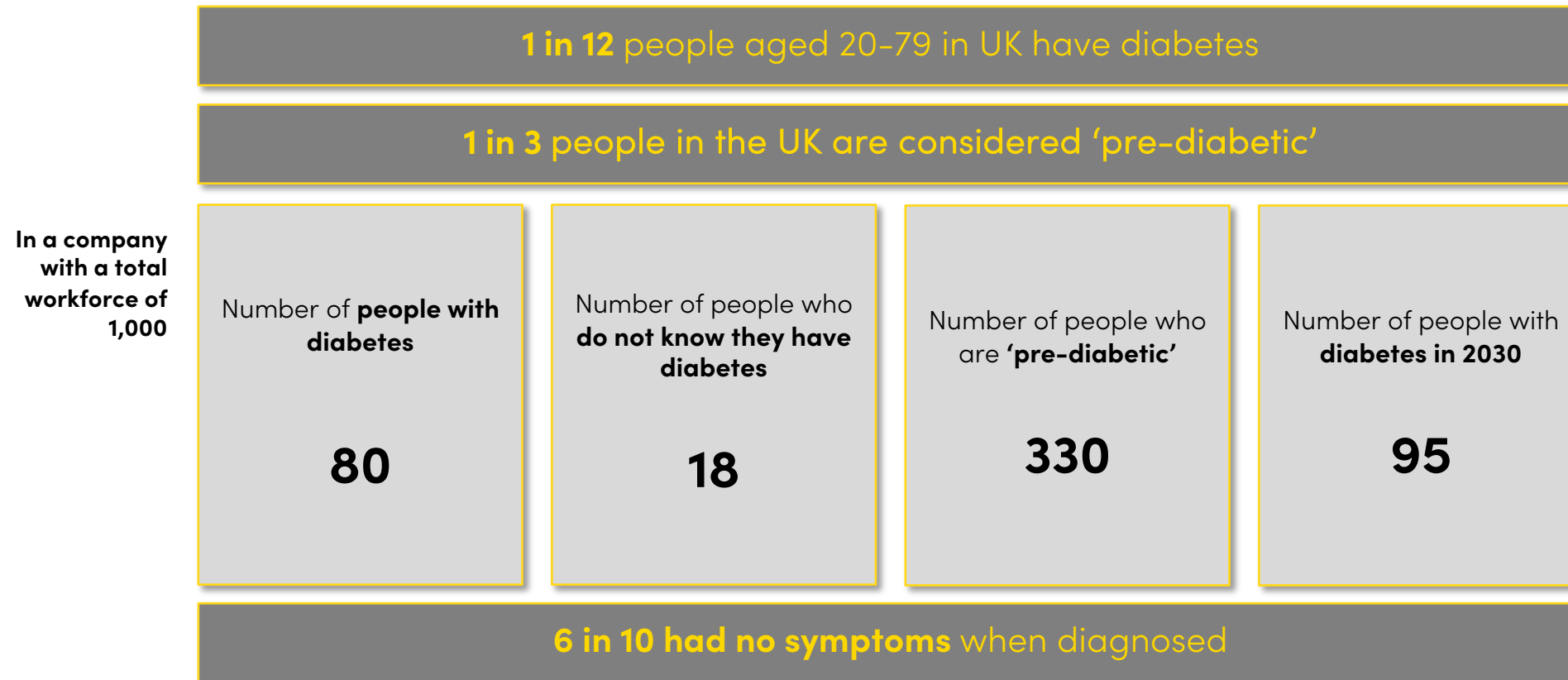
Diabetes can reduce business performance due to:

- **Absenteeism:** even non-severe hypos result in significant time lost
- **Presenteeism** (lower productivity while at work): including meetings rescheduled or avoiding driving
- **Recruitment and retention:** diabetes can result in early retirement and long term sick leave

2. How common is diabetes in the workplace?

Diabetes: **the invisible epidemic**

Diabetes is a fast-growing disease. In the UK, the number of people with diabetes grew by 60% in the last ten years and will continue to rise at a significant pace.



What is the likelihood of **hypos in the workplace?**

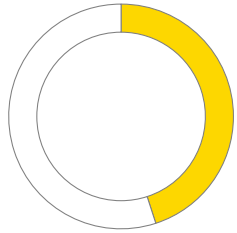
While many people are able to effectively manage their condition, hypoglycaemic episodes are still very common occurrences, even severe hypos which are defined as those which require the assistance of another person.



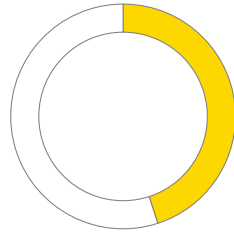
While there is currently no clinical data on the frequency of hyper episodes, there is growing data on the frequency of hypos and their likelihood of occurring at work.

Limited awareness of diabetes in the workplace

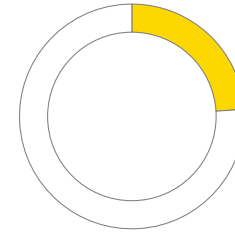
Despite its fast-growing prevalence, the majority of employees do not understand the workplace risks of diabetes and would not be able to recognise or assist a colleague having a hypo.



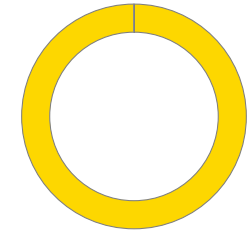
Almost half the workforce (45%) say they know “**next to nothing**” or only “**a little**” about the impact that diabetes has on safety in the workplace



The same respondents said they would **not know what to do** if a colleague had a hypoglycemic episode or would only know general first aid principles



This is despite almost a quarter (24%) of survey respondents indicating they have diabetes and...



100% survey respondents indicating they had one or more risk factors for diabetes (an indicator of potentially undiagnosed diabetes).

3. What is the business impact of diabetes in the workplace?

What are the **safety risks** of diabetes?

Hypos can cause accidents in the workplace – to the person with diabetes, to their colleagues and to the public. Yet the diabetes is often hidden in health and safety incident reporting.

Safety risks from hypos/hypers



Loss of control of machinery and equipment



Motor vehicle collisions
People with diabetes are 30% more likely to have an accident while driving



Falls



Traumatic injuries

Diabetes is often “hidden” in health and safety data and understanding of these incidents yet stories of incidents are common in many workplaces

“We have 6-8 diabetes incidents a week – and about 3 serious events a year where someone has collapsed.” Large construction company

“One of our workers collapsed and fell from scaffolding because he was diabetic. He was lucky to only have minor injuries.” Mid-size construction company

“Last month a colleague passed out in a locked toilet cubicle – they hadn’t told anyone they had diabetes.” National train operator

“I wasn’t aware that the way we have designed our drop off slots and shift patterns means that our drivers who have diabetes won’t be able to manage their condition properly and will not be compliant with DVLA requirements – now I know, we need to change these urgently.” National delivery and logistics company

Safety risks also create **liability risks**

The greater the prevalence of diabetes in the workforce and the more we know about the condition, the greater the requirement for employers to take action to prevent diabetes-related accidents.



In December 2014, a 26-tonne refuse truck crashed into pedestrians in the UK, **killing 6 and injuring 15** others

The driver – alleged to be diabetic – had passed out at the wheel

He had previously passed out when driving a bus but had **not disclosed** this to the driving and licensing regulator (DVLA) when renewing his heavy goods vehicle licence, despite a legal obligation to do so



The city council agreed compensation with families (approx. **£850,000 per family**)

The insurers did not cover all costs – the city council paid £750,000 in **excess**

The case is currently **ongoing 7+ years**

If the diabetes allegation had been proven, both the individual and city council would have faced **criminal charges**



Health and Safety laws create a duty for employers to do what is reasonably practical to ensure health and safety of employees and public. This means:

- Ensuring awareness of diabetes risks and how to identify, prevent and/or assist a person having a hypo
- Protecting employee rights particularly where diabetes is considered a disability
- Creating a culture that encourages disclosure and providing support to manage the condition

What are the **compliance risks** of diabetes?

In most jurisdictions, health and safety laws create a duty for employers to protect against accidents and injury. Other legislation can also create legal obligations related to diabetes in the workplace.

Legislation and regulations

Health and Safety



- Protect employees and non-employees from the health and safety risks arising from work activities
- Protect employees from risk of injury or ill health

Disability



- Do not discriminate against people with diabetes
- Make reasonable adjustments e.g. shift patterns, privacy to test and take medication

Driving



- Notify driving regulator when taking certain medications e.g. insulin
- Regular testing/re-testing/renewal

What are the **productivity risks** of diabetes?

Even non-severe hypos have a significant impact on productivity in the workplace.

After experiencing a non-severe hypo...

- 30% of people **arrived late** to work, on average 2 hr 45 late
- 21% of people **left work early**, on average 2 hr 30 earlier
- 12% of people **missed a full day** or more, on average **missing 4 days**
- 36% **missed a deadline** or rescheduled meetings
- 28% **avoided driving**

In a company
of 1,000
people



Estimated **261 hours lost per month** due to missed work from non-severe hypos – **65 hours a week**

- **Absenteeism** due to poor management/ undiagnosed diabetes is **£8.4 billion per year** (UK data)
- **Early retirement** due to diabetes is **£6.9 billion per year** (UK data)
- During workforce shortages, it is critical that employers can provide a Diabetes Safe culture that **attracts and retains workers** with diabetes

4. Implementing a Diabetes Safe approach

Investing in the **starter package**

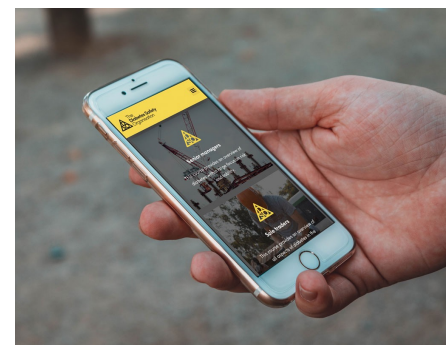
This package allows your organisation to start the conversation about diabetes safety and support key people to understand the risks that the condition can pose to employees and the company.



Sign up to the charter



Joint branded digital awareness posters



Access to online safety training for 10 people



Joint branded digital One Less Challenge posters

Investment: the above starter package including a webinar costs £995 (no VAT)

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