



## Children and Diabetes

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases in school-aged children. The National Institutes of Health estimates there are about 208,000 young people under age 20 in the United States with diabetes. Each year, 23,500 youths are diagnosed with type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

The Centers for Disease Control describes diabetes as the condition in which the body does not properly process food for use as energy. Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, for our bodies to use for energy. The pancreas, an organ that lies near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into the cells of our bodies, where it is used for energy. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin as well as it should. This causes sugars to build up in your blood.

**Symptoms.** The symptoms of type 1 diabetes are due to an increase in the level of glucose in the blood and include:

- Thirst
- Change in Appetite
- Headache
- Dry Mouth
- Blurred Vision
- Weight Loss
- Frequent Urination
- Tired/ Fatigue
- Nausea/ Stomach Pain

These symptoms may be mistaken for severe flu or other viral/ bacterial illnesses. If left undiagnosed or untreated, the child with diabetes may enter into a life-threatening condition, coma and death.

Without a functioning pancreas (as in type 1 diabetes), insulin must be obtained from another source—typically with insulin injections,” explains Sally Kidman, MSN,RN, diabetes educator from Bronson Diabetes and Endocrinology Center. “If the pancreas is still functioning (type 2 diabetes), other medications may need to be taken instead of, or in addition to insulin. If medication is scheduled to be taken during school hours, it is important that school personnel are aware of what the medication is, when/how much to administer and potential side effects to watch for, such as hypoglycemia.”

Low blood glucose levels (hypoglycemia) can be life-threatening. This condition presents the greatest danger to children with diabetes, and must be treated immediately. Usually, the first signs of hypoglycemia are due to the body releasing adrenaline and other hormones/compounds that cause:

- Sweating
- Light-Headedness
- Shakiness
- Weakness
- Hunger
- Irritable/ Stubborn
- Pale Skin
- Headache

As hypoglycemia progresses and there is insufficient blood glucose for the brain to function normally, it can lead to changes in behavior, weakness, confusion, unconsciousness, seizures, and, if prolonged, possibly death. Not all children, especially younger ones, will recognize hypoglycemia symptoms with every episode. Your child should never be left alone when experiencing hypoglycemia.

**If your child is exhibiting any of these symptoms, please talk to your pediatrician right away.**

**If your child has diabetes, please make sure that any person involved in your child's care has the education needed to help keep him/her safe!**

### Sources

Helping the Student with Diabetes Succeed: A Guide for School Personnel <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-communication-programs/ndep/health-care-professionals/school-guide/section3/Documents/NDEP-School-Guide-Full.pdf>  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/media/presskits/aahd/diabetes.pdf>  
American Diabetes Association <http://www.diabetes.org/>

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