



THE ABLE DIABETIC

Able Guide No. 2

Managing Someone with Type 1 Diabetes

A practical guide for managers and HR professionals

Why this guide exists

Most managers who have an employee with Type 1 diabetes want to do the right thing. The difficulty is that T1D is invisible, rarely discussed at work, and widely misunderstood. This guide gives you what you need to be a good manager to someone living with the condition - without making it awkward, clinical, or more complicated than it needs to be.

First: what Type 1 diabetes actually involves

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition in which the pancreas produces no insulin. Unlike Type 2, it has no lifestyle cause and cannot be managed through diet alone. Every person with T1D manages their blood sugar manually, around the clock, every day - calculating insulin doses against food, exercise, stress, illness, and dozens of other variables. Insulin is administered either by injection or through a pump worn on the body. Most people with T1D also wear a Continuous Glucose Monitor (CGM) - a small sensor that tracks blood sugar levels in real time and alerts them to changes that need attention. There is no pause. There is no day off.

The cognitive load is significant and largely invisible. Your employee is doing this quietly, in the background, while also doing their job. For most roles, the condition will have no impact on performance or capability - and that is exactly how most people with T1D prefer it to be understood.

1. Have the conversation once - privately, and properly

If you know an employee has T1D, create a moment to talk about it directly. Not a formal HR meeting - a simple, private conversation. Ask what they need, what adjustments would help, and how they'd like you to handle things day to day. Then follow through, and don't bring it up publicly again unless they do.

Most people with T1D have never been asked this question by a manager. The act of asking it changes the working relationship entirely.

2. Protect breaks and lunch - consistently

Blood sugar management requires regular opportunities to check levels and adjust. A culture of working through lunch, or back-to-back meetings with no natural pause, removes those opportunities and creates additional physical and cognitive pressure. This isn't a special adjustment for one person — it's good management practice that happens to matter significantly more for someone with T1D.

Build breaks into long meeting days as a default. Your whole team will benefit.

3. Be flexible about clinic appointments

People with Type 1 diabetes have regular hospital appointments - diabetic reviews, eye screenings, annual health checks, and more. These are not optional, and NHS appointment times are rarely convenient. Flexibility here costs almost nothing and communicates that you understand the condition is a lifelong management task, not an occasional inconvenience.

4. Learn what a hypo looks like - and know what to do

A hypoglycaemic episode - low blood sugar - can happen without warning. Signs include confusion, pallor, shaking, or unusual behaviour. It needs to be treated immediately with fast-acting sugar: a sugary drink, glucose tablets, or similar. The person usually knows exactly what they need. Your role is simply to give them space, without fuss or an audience, and check in quietly afterwards.

You do not need to intervene medically. You need to not make it worse.

5. Quiet awareness is the goal - not performance

The best thing a manager can do is create an environment where an employee feels safe to signal a need without having to explain themselves in the moment. That means knowing enough to understand when something is happening, responding calmly, and not turning it into a team discussion.

People with T1D often work very hard to keep their condition invisible professionally. Your awareness - held quietly - is what allows them to do that safely.

What not to do: Don't comment on what they're eating or drinking. Don't ask if they "should" be having something. Don't raise the condition in group settings. And don't assume limitations - people with Type 1 diabetes can do anything. There are no foods a Type 1 diabetic cannot eat. They do need to manage their insulin in relation to food, but that is their expertise, not yours.

A note on disability

Type 1 diabetes is recognised as a disability under the Equality Act 2010, which means reasonable adjustments apply in the workplace. However, how an individual relates to that definition is personal. Many people with T1D do not identify as disabled - they identify as entirely able, and have built their professional lives on that basis. The most respectful approach is to follow the individual's lead. Offer adjustments where helpful, without framing the conversation around limitation.

Want to understand more?

Sarah's memoir *INVISIBLE IMPACTS* covers her first decade living with Type 1 diabetes - including the professional realities most people never see.

For weekly insight, visit theablediabetic.com

To enquire about workplace talks, workshops, or bulk book orders, contact Sarah at sarah@theablediabetic.com.

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