

# Diabetes and staff safety



**Kate Walker, owner of Diabetes and You, works with companies and their staff to improve employee health by reducing the number of sick days, boosting productivity and making for a safer work place.**

**Diabetes is the fastest growing health threat facing our nation. More than three million people are living with diabetes in England - seven percent of the population - with one million more people believed to have undiagnosed diabetes. There is greater risk of these people presenting as unwell at work and they could pose an increased safety risk if their sugar levels drop to dangerously low levels while working on or with vehicles and machinery. As yet, no company has been taken to litigation, but the longer we leave people undiagnosed and poorly managed, the greater the risk of a court case against a company.**

Diabetes can be an invisible condition that slowly impacts on people's health and can lead to medical conditions such as erectile dysfunction, amputations, eye and kidney damage. Diagnosis is often missed in the early stages as the symptoms can be put down to late nights and other lifestyle factors. Helping people to check if they have diabetes and then understand this manageable condition, is crucial to today's busy work force. It is known that those living with diabetes are more likely to be off sick, have more days off during any given sick period and have increased risk of depression.



The symptoms of diabetes are easily brushed aside and often ignored as people just get on with their busy lives. Some of the symptoms of diabetes include excessive thirst, frequent or increased urination especially at night, excessive hunger, fatigue, blurred vision and sores or cuts that won't heal. We need to help people understand the risk of ignoring these warning signs.



Diabetes is a serious, life-long, health condition that occurs when the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood is too high because the body can't use it properly. If left untreated it can cause serious health complications. Up to 75 percent of men suffering from diabetes will experience some degree of erectile dysfunction. Diabetes is also the leading cause of blindness in the UK working age population. In addition to this, people who are diagnosed and taking certain medication must inform the Driving and Vehicle Licence Agency (DVLA) as they are at increased risk of hypoglycaemia (extremely low



blood sugar levels) while operating vehicles or machinery. It is vital for companies to understand and ensure all staff are following regulations for blood testing and declaring medication and health changes, to avoid injury or worse scenarios while at work.

With the epidemic continuing to grow, greater and greater pressure is being placed on individuals, employers, the National Health Service and Public Health. Diabetes currently costs the NHS £10 billion a year, of which £8 billion is known to be for avoidable complications. The total direct care and indirect costs associated with diabetes in the UK alone, currently stands at £23.7 billion.

The question remains, who is responsibility for the management of this condition? I believe it is time for everyone to take responsibility. We need to increase the understanding of diabetes and its long-term impact. In its early stages, diabetes is an invisible condition but when diagnosed is fully manageable with lifestyle changes and medication. Simple changes to lifestyle can

make a significant difference. It is not about a restrictive diet, it is about making small changes and better choices. For example, one less fizzy drink a week would decrease a person's sugar intake by 364 teaspoons of sugar per year and that's almost a 1.8kg bag of sugar.

We need to raise awareness and understanding of this epidemic and start taking back control. It is important for business to support their staff and create a safe environment for everyone. If we do not empower people, the disease will continue to silently cause irreversible damage. In addition, the challenges and pressures on business today mean that a strategic focus on wellbeing is more essential than ever. A healthy workforce who knows you care about them will increase business productivity and reduce expensive accidents and possible claims.

Diabetes & You helps companies improve employee health through a number of initiatives, including talks, workshops and other support methods for employees.

[www.diabetesandyou.co.uk](http://www.diabetesandyou.co.uk)

	A1c (%)	Fasting Plasma Glucose		Oral Glucose Tolerance Test	
		mg/dl	mmol/l	mg/dl	mmol/l
Diabetes	6.5 & above	126 & above	7 & above	200 & above	11.1 & above
Pre Diabetes	5.7 to 6.4	100 to 126	5.56 to 7	140 to 199	7.77 to 11
Healthy	Below 5.6	99 & below	3.89 & below	139 & below	7.72 & below

