

'Schoolies' Week

Information for Parents

The tradition of young people going away with their friends for a week after their final year at school usually causes anxiety for most parents.

If you are a parent of a teenager with diabetes heading for 'schoolies' week, this anxiety is even greater. Often this is the first time your teenager will be away from home without you and without adult supervision.

It is important to ensure that teenagers who are heading to 'schoolies' week receive education and advice on how to manage the following issues:

- alcohol consumption
- management of diabetes during a 'hang-over'
- sexual issues
- general safety issues relevant to all teenagers (including drug taking)

By preparing your teenager on how to deal with these issues, they will be better equipped to deal with them appropriately if they arise.

Ideally your teenager should receive education and advice around the issues of 'schoolies' week from their diabetes educator or diabetes doctor.

Be encouraged that most teenagers with diabetes come through this week with no adverse consequences from their diabetes.

Alcohol Consumption

Underage drinking is not recommended for any teenager. If a teenager with diabetes is consuming alcohol, then they need to be aware of the following information:

- alcohol, particularly sweet alcohol beverages can initially raise blood glucose levels
- alcohol may inhibit glucose release from the liver, increasing the risk of delayed hypoglycaemia
- alcohol consumption can lead to confusion which may reduce the teenager's ability to manage a hypoglycaemic event.

The following precautions need to be taken by your teenager if they are consuming alcohol:

- drink in moderation
- avoid 'binge' drinking
- do not substitute alcohol for food
- monitor blood glucose levels regularly, particularly prior to bed
- do not drink alcohol to excess as this may cause vomiting
- drink low-alcohol beers or wine rather than spirits

- be encouraged to eat carbohydrate while consuming alcohol
- eat some carbohydrate before going to bed
- if nausea prevents eating, insulin must **never** be stopped. They need to commence their 'Sick Day' plan.

Note: Even if 'hung over' and food can't be eaten then a reduced dose of insulin may be needed but **never** stopped. During this time blood glucose testing needs to be performed regularly. The 'Sick Day' plan needs to be started.

Ideally: A written plan for 'hangovers' should be included in the 'Sick Day' plan. This plan should be developed with your teenager before going to 'schoolies week'. This can be done by you or by your teenager's diabetes educator or diabetes doctor.

Alcohol and Sex

Alcohol impairs judgement and teenagers are more likely to engage in unsafe sexual practices when they have been drinking. Associated risks include:

- casual sexual encounters
- exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and an unplanned pregnancy
- date rape

It is essential that parents have open communication with their teenager about sexual activity and the risks involved in having unsafe sex.

Drug Taking

Drug taking, whether on an occasional or regular basis, is likely to impair a young person's decision making regarding their diabetes management.

The specific issues with drug taking for a teenager with diabetes are:

- most recreation drugs alter mood, perception and cognitive ability
- a decreased interest in routines e.g. injection taking and eating
- an increased risk of hypoglycaemia being ignored or misinterpreted
- reduced appetite which can lead to hypoglycaemia (except when using marijuana)

(adapted from the Clinical practice guidelines: Type 1 diabetes in children and adolescents)

In the case of marijuana, appetite can be increased (known as the 'munchies'). Marijuana has a powerful anti-nausea effect and may disguise symptoms of ketoacidosis (DKA) such as nausea and vomiting. This can result in the teenager presenting later with DKA which can be life threatening.

For further information and advice for parents on alcohol and drug consumption amongst young people visit the following websites.

www.health.vic.gov.au

www.cyh.com.au

www.adf.org.au

References

1. Stillman, J., Lang, E., et.al., (2003) *Paediatric and Adolescent Diabetes Education Manual, For Health Professionals*, Queensland Health, Queensland Government Publication
2. Clinical practice guidelines: Type 1 diabetes in children and adolescents. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government, March, 2005; 188-189.
3. 'Reality Check' website: www.realitycheck.org.au
4. Novo Nordisk, *Going Out / Staying Out*, Publication