

We know that exams can be stressful for anyone. Managing diabetes can then add some extra stress. To perform at your best it is important to have glucose as close to target range as possible. When glucose levels are too high you may be thirsty, tired, and have difficulty concentrating. When glucose levels go too low you can also have trouble concentrating and become distracted and confused. Stress can also impact glucose levels making them go high or low. It is very individual! Some students with diabetes trial different approaches to management around the “mock exam” period, to try and work out what will be the best approach to manage blood glucose levels around the actual exams.

Special Assessment Conditions

Young people with diabetes are eligible to apply for New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) Special Assessment Conditions for NCEA Exams. This typically is in the form of allowance for “rest breaks”. These can be 10 minutes on top of an hours assessment, so up to 30 minutes for a three hour exam. Your school has to apply to NZQA for this under Special Assessment Conditions. Rest breaks allow for extra time to be added to the exam period if the student has to stop participating in the exam because of medical necessity. For diabetes this can be in the form of checking blood glucose levels, treating hypoglycaemia (hypos), and/or administering insulin. For students to qualify for Special Assessment Conditions, applications are made by the school and submitted to NZQA well before exam time. Applications require a medical report confirming the diagnosis of diabetes and stating what medical requirements may be needed in an exam situation. Please contact your Diabetes Team and ask them to provide this report for you.

This formal entitlement means it will be on the Exam Centre Manager’s schedule. It typically indicates that you will need extra supplies with you in the exam room, such as your blood glucose meter, carbohydrate snacks, fast-acting glucose, and insulin pens, syringes or pump. Your diabetes team can also provide you with a letter to take with you to exams outlining that you have diabetes and that you need to take these items with you into the exam room.

Be Prepared

Make sure that you are prepared with non-noisy hypotreatment foods with you (no crinkly packets!). Remember to take both fast acting carbohydrate food (e.g., glucose tablets or juice drinks) as well as long acting carbohydrate snacks (e.g., muesli or nut bars).

Make sure that your CGM will not expire within the next 24 hours. Take your glucose meter and finger pricker, check the battery in your meter and make sure you have enough test strips with you. You may need to use a “reader” or “scanner” or your insulin pump rather than have your cellphone with you. If you need your cellphone you may need to give it to an examiner.

Ensure that your insulin pump has fresh insulin and is fully charged. If using insulin pens then make sure you have enough insulin with you if you need a correction.

Inform Others

Before the exam make sure the exam supervisors are aware that you have diabetes. Show them the letter from your diabetes team. You can also show them your meter/reader and what you have with you. Often the supervisors are independent of your teachers/lecturers so may not know. The last thing you want is to be asked why you have food or a device with you!

Exam Room

Having diabetes does not mean you have to sit your exams in a different room. However, it can be useful to sit at the side or back of the room to minimise disturbance for other students if you need to do diabetes management tasks. It is important to know that NZQA Exam Supervisors are not always school staff so they may not know who you are or that you have diabetes.

Monitor Glucose Levels

Stress affects glucose levels and exams are stressful! You may go high you may go low. If you need to take action then inform the supervisor straight away. This will ensure that the action is registered with the examiners and will mean that you can do what you need to do without anyone trying to stop you. If you do have a hypo that interferes with your exam performance let your diabetes team know with your CGM data and we can provide medical support.

Derived Grade Procedure

Exams are often stressful so you want to make sure things are all sorted early. If you were unable to complete the exam or you believe your performance was significantly affected by diabetes whilst preparing for, or during your exam, then a Derived Grade Procedure is taken. A medical certificate is required in these cases and for this you must provide “evidence” that blood glucose levels played a role therefore, you need to be checking your blood glucose levels regularly throughout the exam.