

Medical mobiles

Help and advice for centres with students who need a mobile phone in the exam room for monitoring medical conditions

Published autumn 2025



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Introduction

Over the last few years there have been developments in useful software to help students who need to monitor their diabetes by using mobile phone technology. However, this presents challenges to exam centres due to the JCQ restrictions on devices. Other medical conditions are also being monitored through mobile phones, so this guidance may help with those cases too.

Often centres have queries on how to navigate this important topic. While no centre wants to put a student at a disadvantage, it is important that a student does not have an unfair advantage due to being able to access the internet on a mobile phone during an exam.

Under equality laws, diabetes is classed as a disability, and this means awarding bodies, schools and colleges are required to make reasonable adjustments to make sure students are not placed at a disadvantage. Stress and a change in eating habits due to the exam schedule can make a huge difference to these students, causing their medical conditions to be affected.

Every student is different, and their medical condition and how they manage it can be different too. We would recommend a meeting with the student, their family and any appropriate staff in your centre to discuss their current situation and any concerns or arrangements that can be put in place. What works for one student may not work for another. Each situation needs to be considered individually; one student may be very experienced at managing their condition and would prefer to be in the main room with their peers, while another might find that managing their blood sugars is more challenging and their levels can be quite unstable, so they may need a smaller room due to concerns about disturbing others or needing to ask for additional help.

[Diabetes UK](#) has a brilliant [Diabetes UK School pack](#) which can help you with the meeting.

Mock exams provide an excellent chance to try out students' requirements and see how they get on and give the Exams team more understanding of what may need to be put in place.

Students may need access arrangements or special consideration – or both.

A glossary of terms and additional information is included at the end of this document. If the student needs medical assistance, someone trained in first aid would ideally be best to help.

Access arrangements

Common adjustments for students with diabetes might include:

- taking their blood sugar meter into the exam
- supervised rest breaks
- taking drinks and snacks into the exam to prevent or treat a hypo
- taking insulin treatment into the exam to treat hyperglycaemia. This may involve using an insulin pen to inject insulin or using their insulin pump to deliver a bolus (insulin dose)
- permitting more toilet breaks as students experiencing high blood sugar levels may need to urinate more often. They may also need to access water or sugar free drinks as high blood sugar levels can make people feel very thirsty
- a CGM (continuous glucose monitor) or insulin pump which is read/controlled via an app on a mobile device.

A CGM (continuous glucose monitor) and/or pump is commonly used by students to manage their diabetes via an app on their mobile phone. Some CGMs and pumps can be used with a standalone reader or controller in place of a phone. These do not connect with the internet.

As mobile phones are not allowed as standard, you can request approval for this by submitting an application via Access Arrangements Online. A Form 9 confirming the student's medical condition and the need to access their mobile phone during an exam must be completed. Formal evidence, such as a letter from the student's diabetes team or doctor, must be available to confirm the student's medical condition. Access Arrangements Online will approve applications where a student with a medical condition will be subject to 1:1 invigilation when in possession of their mobile phone to ensure the integrity of the exam. The phone can be handed to an invigilator to hold (as long as they stay within the signal range of the monitor), or it could be on a nearby desk or table but out of the student's reach.

1:1 invigilation does not have to be a single room with their own invigilator for every exam – it could be that the student is accommodated in a small or large/main room with other students, but that a single invigilator will individually monitor the student closely at any point they need to have access to their phone.

If they are in a room with other students, additional invigilators will be needed so that the necessary vigilance can be applied to the individual using a mobile while still fulfilling the regulation numbers needed for all the other students. This is to ensure that the student is only accessing their phone for their medical software and not to get unfair assistance with completing the exam.

Supervised rest breaks

The student should have a Form 9 completed for supervised rest breaks as they may need to take one to check their blood sugar levels (through access to a phone, CGM reader or a blood sugar meter) and to take corrective action as necessary. The student may need to wait for their sugar levels to rise/drop after action taken before they continue with the exam, and it's possible that low/high levels could affect their ability to concentrate. If they are unable to continue the exam due to their symptoms, then it may be appropriate to stop and not continue with the exam. The Special consideration section of this document explains what to do if a student is unable to continue with an exam.

Food and drink in the exam room

Food and drink is allowed in the exam room under centre approval. It is recommended to ask the student to provide some snacks in small, named, sealed packs for the room, in case needed (e.g. sweets/box of juice/pack of biscuits) so that if needed, they can have something familiar which they know will help them. The Exams team can check these in advance to make sure there is nothing on the packaging which could assist the student.

Other considerations for exam day

- Please consider any clashes of exams (especially where supervision is over lunchtime) as students may need to ensure they have access to the appropriate foods.
- If the student needs to bring in a blood sugar testing kit, this just needs to be visually checked to ensure no notes etc. are included and then placed ready for access should it be needed.
- In your planning, you should consider how the arrangements will affect other students in the exam room. Perhaps put the student nearer the door so they can get out easily, if necessary.
- Whatever arrangements you have in place, you need to make sure your invigilators are fully briefed and prepared.
- It can be helpful for your invigilators to have a laminate or sheet of paper with the student's picture as well as any information about what they may need and what symptoms to watch out for if they feel unwell and are experiencing a hypo/hyper (in case their monitor is not working). Some students may wish to share their blood sugar range with you so that you are aware of what levels would be outside their usual range. If the student has an Individual Healthcare Plan, it might contain this information. You/they may want to write down their levels when they check them during the exam.

Special consideration

If an existing medical condition (like diabetes) affects the student's performance at the time of the assessment, you can apply for special consideration.

If the student completed the exam despite being affected, the application should be for 'Present but Disadvantaged'. You can select 'flare up of a long-term condition' as an option within the system.

If they were able to complete a very small amount of the exam, please apply for 'Present but Disadvantaged', select 'the candidate became unwell during the exam and was unable to complete it' and indicate how long they were in the exam. The Special Requirements team will consider all the factors and decide the most appropriate outcome they can put in place.

If the student was unable to take the exam, you can submit an 'Absent' special consideration application.

If you have any questions about supporting students with diabetes or any other access arrangements, please get in touch with our Special Requirements team. We are happy to help.

Glossary and additional information

- Continuous glucose monitor (CGM) – this is a small wearable device that measures glucose levels in real time. It uses a sensor to continuously send information to a handset or compatible mobile phone. For further information see Digibete webpage – [Type 1 Technology & Resources](#)
- Hyper (hyperglycaemia) – when blood sugar levels (blood glucose levels) are too high. For further information, including symptoms, see Diabetes UK webpage – [Hyperglycaemia \(Hyper\)](#)
- Hypo (hypoglycaemia) – when blood sugar levels (blood glucose levels) drop too low. This is usually below 4mmol/l. For further information, including symptoms, see Diabetes UK webpage – [What is a hypo \(hypoglycaemia\)?](#)
- Insulin pump – this is a small wearable device that delivers small amounts of basal (background) insulin every few minutes, 24 hours a day. It can also deliver a bolus (extra short-acting insulin dose) for meals and to bring down high blood glucose levels. For further information see Digibete webpage – [Type 1 Technology & Resources](#)

Treating a hypo and recovery time

- **If a student is having a hypo, it requires immediate treatment** as it can become very serious quickly. If identified early, students will normally be able to treat the hypo themselves, usually with fast acting carbohydrate e.g. glucose tablets, certain sugary sweets or a full sugar drink like fruit juice. After initial treatment, blood sugar levels should return to normal after about 15 minutes. However, this may vary, and in some cases students may need to repeat the hypo treatment. So, it is important to closely monitor blood sugar levels during this time.
- After treating a hypo, the student may need to eat or drink something to stop their blood sugar levels from dropping again. This would normally be a slower-acting carbohydrate, e.g. a sandwich, a piece of fruit or a glass of milk.
- It is not possible to specify a recovery time for a hypo as every individual will be different. However, as an example, for drivers, the DVLA specify allowing 45 minutes after treating a hypo before driving again.
- **Sometimes people with diabetes experience a severe hypo – this is where they require assistance from someone else and/or lose consciousness. If someone loses consciousness they must not be given food or drink due to the risk of choking. An ambulance should be called and the person should be placed in the recovery position while waiting for the ambulance to arrive.**
- For further information, including symptoms, see Diabetes UK webpage – [What is a hypo \(hypoglycaemia\)?](#)

Treating a hyper and recovery time

- Hyperglycaemia, or hyper for short, means high blood sugar levels. Hypers can happen for many reasons, including not having enough insulin, doing less activity than usual, stress or illness. If high blood sugar levels are left untreated for a prolonged period, there is a risk of a potentially life-threatening condition called diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA).
- It's important that the student has a hyper management plan, and this should be in their Individual Healthcare Plan as the treatment will be individual to them. Treatment can include checking blood sugar levels more frequently, checking blood ketone levels with a meter and having additional insulin to bring their blood sugar levels down. If a student has high blood sugar levels, it's very important that they should be allowed to drink sugar free fluids and go to the toilet as often as they need to. If a student is ill their parent/guardian will need to be contacted regardless of their blood sugar levels.
- If a student uses an insulin pump and has high blood sugar levels, they will need to check that their insulin pump is still connected and working. This is because DKA can develop very quickly in people using insulin pumps. The student may need a private space outside of the exam hall to make these checks.

Symptoms of DKA include:

- **Stomach pain**
- **Being very thirsty**
- **Needing to wee more often**
- **Blurred vision**
- **Drowsiness**
- **Nausea or being sick**
- **Fruity or sweet-smelling breath, like nail polish remover or pear drops**
- **Passing out**

If you have any concerns about the student, an ambulance should be called.

Following treatment of high blood sugar levels, it's not possible to specify how long a student may need before they feel ready to continue with their exam. Hyperglycaemia can affect concentration levels and cognitive function.

For more information on diabetes and high blood sugar levels, please see: [Hyperglycaemia \(Hypers\)](#) | [High Blood Sugar](#) | [Diabetes UK](#)

Information on DKA:

[Diabetic ketoacidosis \(DKA\)](#) | [Ketosis symptoms and treatment](#) | [Diabetes UK](#)

Digibete also has information on hyperglycaemia, including a video on hyperglycaemia and exams. This is the link to the main page – if you search 'hyperglycaemia', information will come up in the menu: [Home - DigiBete](#)

Contact us

Our friendly Exams Officer Services team will be happy to support you between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

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