

Research findings

Diabetes and exercising – focus groups exploring how adolescents and young adults with Type 1 Diabetes experience exercising from their own perspective and their parents

▶ WHAT WAS THE AIM?

The aim of this study was to find out how young people with Type 1 Diabetes manage their diabetes around exercise, and to identify the challenges they face. We will use this information to help develop guidelines that will allow people with Type 1 Diabetes to exercise safely.

▶ HOW DID WE DO IT?

We invited people with Type 1 Diabetes aged 13 to 25 years, and parents of people aged 13-18 years to attend a focus group. At each focus group we had a maximum of 10 people who were asked questions as a group and individually about the way they exercise and the problems or benefits they get from exercising. The focus group discussions went for between 45 minutes to one hour. All of the groups were recorded and the discussions were entered into software to determine the common challenges identified.

▶ WHAT DID WE FIND?

Challenges Identified

The number one challenge identified was maintaining a sustainable blood glucose level (BGL). Managing food and managing equipment to monitor glucose levels and to administer insulin were also key challenges. Challenges related to how you felt included fear of going low and high, frustration at not being able to do spontaneous activity or having to stop the activity for diabetes management. Challenges related to other people included their reactions when they saw diabetes-related equipment and dealing with their lack of diabetes knowledge.

Parents identified the same challenges that their adolescent children faced as well as a few of their own. These were how to give more autonomy to their child while being physically active and trying not to be too overbearing. Parents also discussed the challenges of encouraging their child to exercise and participate fully in physical activities despite their diabetes.

Strategies Identified

Strategies that worked to help you maintain your BGL when being active included using temporary basals, turning off the pump at various times, and determining key patterns for various activities. Some of you had developed extensive self-knowledge about what foods worked better at different stages of the activity and for different types of activities. Being highly organised was considered necessary when being active. One strategy you identified as a way of dealing with the challenges associated with other people was to be open and honest.

▶ WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?

This information will be combined with findings of other research to develop guidelines to help young people with Type 1 Diabetes to be physically active. We will be reaching out to sporting clubs and organisations to improve and increase community awareness of Type 1 Diabetes and the role they can have in supporting you to be physically active.