



# Eating Disorders & Diabetes T1

An introductory  
resource



# What is T1 Diabetes?

T1 Diabetes is an often genetic condition which affects the body's ability to control blood sugar levels. T1 Diabetes is made manageable by taking insulin and by regularly monitoring such things as blood sugar levels, calories, and body weight.



# How might people affected by eating disorders experience T1 Diabetes differently?



## **Special focus on food and weight**

For those living with eating disorders, it is common to become very preoccupied with food, eating, weight, and dieting 'rules'; and with T1 Diabetes, people also need to be preoccupied with these exact topics. It can be a point of stress to feel like you are constantly having to worry about food, weight and eating.

## **Social settings**


In order to maintain healthy blood sugar levels, people with Diabetes often find themselves eating at times when other people are not eating; if they also are affected by an eating disorder, this may make them feel especially self-conscious or guilty.

## **An added stress**

Living with diabetes and managing the condition can be stressful, disruptive and overwhelming, and individuals may feel a loss of control, which can be a motivating factor in the development of an eating disorder.


## **Attitudes to food types**

With T1 Diabetes, people may need to eat specific foods in order to raise their blood sugar levels - but if they are also affected by an eating disorder, they may come to view these foods as 'bad'. So foods that are necessary for healthy living may trigger feelings of guilt or shame.




# What is 'diabulemia'?

People with T1 diabetes are also at risk of experiencing '**diabulemia**'.



Often when a person is diagnosed with T1 Diabetes, they may have lost a significant amount of weight. We live in a society where, if somebody loses a significant amount of weight, they may receive a lot of praise.



To then be given insulin, which is weight restoring, **may mean that a person develops a fear around insulin and weight gain** and even avoid taking the amount of insulin they need to be healthy.

# Talking to your support network

If you feel comfortable telling your ED support workers and/or your Diabetes team that you are living with diabetes and an eating disorder, they can make key changes to how they work with you to get you the best support:

**Collaborating between ED teams and Diabetes teams for an informed, holistic approach**

**Being careful about language around weight and foods**

**Compassionately addressing fears around taking insulin and weight restoration**

**Challenging beliefs and language about carbohydrates**

**Exploring what it's like to live with diabetes and how it impacts mental health**

**Avoiding concept of 'good' and 'bad' foods when providing nutritional advice**





# Seeking out support

How can people affected by eating disorders and T1 Diabetes get further support and information?

1

## Speak to your diabetes healthcare team

Your diabetes team is there to support you in all aspects of living with diabetes, including the emotional side of it. They can help you to develop a plan to navigate living with both diabetes and disordered eating.

2

## SWEDA can help

We specialise in providing support and guidance to people affected by eating disorders. Our services are available in parts of the South & West.

3

## Diabetes UK

This charity provide information, support groups and a helpline for people affected by diabetes. They have a dedicated webpage with more details on the relationship between diabetes and eating disorders.

[www.diabetes.org.uk/living-with-diabetes/emotional-wellbeing/eating-disorders-and-diabetes](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/living-with-diabetes/emotional-wellbeing/eating-disorders-and-diabetes)



# Further reading from Diabetes UK

Diabetes UK have excellent webpages on the following subjects:

[Eating disorders and diabetes](#)

[Diabulimia and diabetes](#)

[Supporting someone with diabulimia](#)

[Diabetes distress and burnout](#)

[Diabetes, mental health & emotional wellbeing research](#)

## Helplines you can reach out to

**Diabetes UK:** [0345 123 239](tel:0345123239)

**Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm**

A dedicated diabetes helpline for all people with diabetes, their family or friends, and people who are worried they might be at risk.

**SWEDA Mindline:** [0300 330 5464](tel:03003305464)

**Tuesdays, 8pm - 11pm, and Sundays, 11am - 2pm**

Speak to a trained volunteer counsellor about eating concerns, eating disorders, disordered eating, and ways to access further support in the South & West.