



Speaking from Experience Young People & Type 1 Diabetes

Transcript for chapter 5 of 8: School life

Andrea 19, diagnosed 12: When I was at school, I found that everyone was pretty understanding of me having diabetes. When I first got diagnosed, my mum made sure that all the teachers and the principal and school nurse knew that I had diabetes. She wrote them all letters. There was one time when I first got diagnosed, I went low, so I went to have a chocolate bar or something, or jellybeans. My teacher got a bit annoyed with me, and said that I had to wait until lunchtime, nobody else is allowed to eat. I got a little bit upset, and I said that I had to eat because I'm a diabetic and my blood sugar is low. He said he was sorry and that he forgot. Then, the nurse came and she said that everything was fine and brought me jellybeans and made sure that I was okay. In future, she made me a card that said that I could get out of class and go straight to first aid, no questions asked, so that there wouldn't be any problems like that in the future.

Kayla 15, diagnosed 11: I think the students can stop bugging me, asking why do I get to go out and eat in class, why am I drinking.

Tori 19, diagnosed 6: I've never experienced any stigma or bullying because of type 1 diabetes. Maybe a passing comment in high school and you're in year eight and the boys are 13 to 15 and it's all they can come up with. It's never really affected me, I haven't really been bullied because of it – which I am glad. Everyone's pretty understanding.

Michael 18, diagnosed 16: When I tell people that I have diabetes, no one's ever negative about it. Some people don't really know what to say, but I'm a pretty outgoing person, myself. So, it's pretty easy to explain it and then they're comfortable about it.

Andrea: I think my nurse at my school actually ran a mini-course for all the teachers in the school, just to give them a run down about what diabetes is.

Kayla: All the teachers got information from booklets I took in. They told them what it was and what they should do if I was sick or if I had a hypo.

Tori: My friends were always really curious, asking questions about the condition. My close friends knew that if I needed to get sugar, I needed to get sugar. Most teachers understood. I think there was a picture of me up in the school sick bay or staff room saying, 'type 1 diabetes' and what it is.

Michael: The school itself made a room available for me. Especially at the start, it was really nerve-racking with the injections. I used to have a needle phobia, which made getting diabetes a lot more confronting.

Scott 19, diagnosed 4: In primary school I was always two per day, two syringes per day. So, I didn't really have to do it at all at school. Which was really cool and it helped me to fit in at school, as I grew up. When I got into secondary school, there was that transition from primary school to secondary school, and from two syringes to four. Maybe year eight or nine, I got onto four [syringes]. It was hard to do my needle at school; I'd never done it before.



People had sometimes seen me do a finger test, and by the time I got to VCE [final years of high school], everyone knew I had diabetes.

Andrea: All my friends were quite understanding because I'd have to do my insulin pen needle at lunch time. By the end of it, they knew what I was doing and they would ask if I had done my needles yet. I remember there was one stage when I got pretty slack with testing my blood glucose levels and my best friend would always say, "Have you done your BSL [Blood Sugar Level] yet?" and would be really on my case about doing it. So, they were really supportive.

Tori: At school, it was made easier if teachers understood that I needed to leave class if I needed to go to the toilet or if I needed to have sugar. If I needed to eat in class then I could do it. It never really impacted on any results or successes or anything. It was more just taking time out because I needed to go and eat something or get a drink of water or go to the toilet.

Rachel 19, diagnosed 7: My school work was affected by having diabetes, more at exams period because I would have to organise alternate exam arrangements for Uni and also when I was at high school, Special Consideration for year 12 exams. It does affect your school work. For me, when I'm stressed, which I do get with school work as everyone does, it makes my levels go really high. So, I've got all the study to deal with, the stress from the study and on top of that, my levels being high and having to deal with that.

Scott: When you're in an exam, you're stressed, you're nervous, and that affects your blood glucose level. Most of the time when I'm stressed or nervous, my blood glucose levels go up, so then I've got to have insulin. It's a balancing act. You can't be too high and you can't be too low. If you're too high, you're going to sweat and be really thirsty, and then you'll need to go to the toilet. It's really crazy. If you give yourself too much insulin, then you're on the other end of the scale. You can't concentrate, you start to get the shakes, you know that you're low and you've got to have that time out.

Andrea: If students are in high school or they're studying VCE it's worth seeing if there are schemes out there, that are run by your state, that can help you. Of course they are going to take into consideration that you have a chronic disease and that it impacts on your studies whether you've gone high or low. During SACS or exams, you might have difficulty with your blood sugar levels.

Scott: If I didn't chase up special consideration, my exams would have been worse off.

Rachel: Work has also been affected by it, just because I worked as a waitress. When you're on your feet, you're doing so much activity that you can't help but go low. I always felt really bad about that, but as long as you're open, like I was open with my boss about being diabetic, so that was all fine. Sport, not so much. I love sport and I've played it so much all throughout my life. As long as you have some food before you go, you generally won't go low.