



Fact Sheet

Diabetes

What Is Diabetes?

Our pancreas produces insulin, which allows each cell of the body to use the glucose we eat for energy. Glucose is the major source of energy that fuels our bodies. Diabetes occurs when our bodies do not produce enough insulin. When this happens, glucose builds up in the bloodstream because the cells cannot use it. In effect, the body is starving even when the affected person is eating normally.

In **Type I diabetes**, the pancreas loses its ability to produce insulin. Type I diabetes (formerly called childhood diabetes) often begins in childhood or early adulthood. While we do not know specifically what causes Type I diabetes, genetics are a risk factor.

In **Type II diabetes**, the body is still able to produce insulin but does not produce enough, or the body does not respond normally to the insulin. Obesity and genetics contribute to its development. An increased incidence of Type II diabetes has been linked to the increase in childhood obesity.

How Can Diabetes Affect Youth at School?

Some difficulties that teachers may see at school associated with high blood sugar in youth with diabetes include: blurry vision; fatigue; decreased focus and attention or confusion; and/or frequent urination and thirst. For youth with diabetes, additional concerns include nausea, vomiting, and/or weight loss. Having blood sugar levels that are too low are also problematic and can be life-threatening. In these instances, teachers may see the youth acting strangely or confused, appearing pale, jittery, sweaty, feeling nauseated, and have a seizure in extreme cases. Symptoms of high and low blood sugars can overlap. Checking blood sugar is a useful method to verify the level. Teachers should understand that very low blood sugars are a medical emergency requiring urgent action.

Continued, page 2





Diabetes

Continued from page 1.

How Do We Work with Youth with Diabetes at School?

An Individual Health Plan should be part of the child's Individualized Education Program, and should include information on regular monitoring, medication management, diet and exercise. The following should be included in the Health Plan:

- Have emergency plans that are utilized when blood sugar is too high or too low, or when the youth has significant symptoms.
- Allow time and place for the youth to privately take medication/insulin injections/check blood sugar.
- Discuss diet requirements and allow for consistent times to eat meals and snacks, particularly on days when the normal school schedule is changed.
- Identify types and amount of regular exercise that should be included, such as during physical education classes.
- Allow for extra bathroom breaks.
- Have emergency snacks (e.g., hard candy, orange juice, graham crackers) readily available in case of low blood sugar.
- Plan to address symptoms (e.g., fatigue or attention/memory difficulties) in the classroom as they arise. ♦