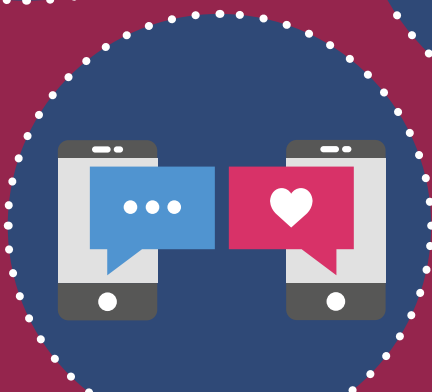
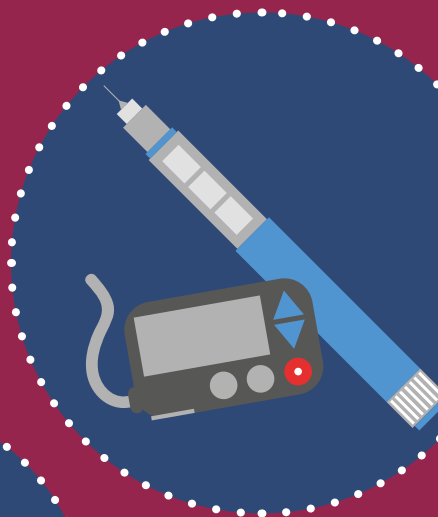


# Sex, relationships and Type 1 diabetes

Developed as part of SEREN Connect diabetes education;  
supporting young people and young adults living with  
Type 1 diabetes





**Quality in Care**  
Diabetes Education Programme of the Year 2020  
**Quality in Care**  
Diabetes Judge's Special Award 2020

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**With thanks to all who inspired, contributed,  
and believed in this programme.**

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**We're committed to creating resources that  
work for the people who use them.**

Please take a moment to provide us with  
some feedback. A few minutes of your time  
makes a really big difference.

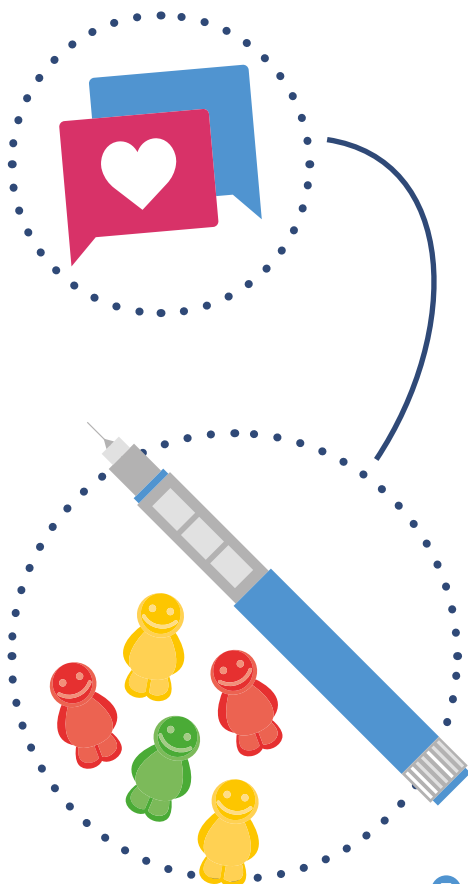


# First and foremost, not everyone feels comfortable talking about sex... but it is an important topic to talk about

**The more you understand about sex and relationships, the better placed you are to make informed decisions, including keeping yourself safe and ensuring your Type 1 diabetes doesn't get in the way.**

**Only you will know when you are ready, but there are some points you need to consider:**

- The age of consent in the UK is 16 years of age
- The age of consent applies to everyone: regardless of gender or sexual orientation
- This may not necessarily be the right age for you
- Many people do not have sex for the first time until they are older
- People feel ready at different times for different reasons
- You should never feel pressurised into having sex with anyone



## **You may already have received talks about sexual health at school, college, university or at home.**

This may have included talking about contraception and protecting yourself from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). These are things everybody, with or without Type 1 diabetes, needs to know about.

This leaflet doesn't cover these but you can find more information here:

**[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LiveWell/LifestyleWellbeing/Sexualhealth](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LiveWell/LifestyleWellbeing/Sexualhealth)**

## **Type 1 diabetes can affect all people, whether you identify as:**

- bisexual
- gay
- heterosexual
- lesbian

Your healthcare team are there to support you and if you feel comfortable, to discuss anything in relation to your sexual orientation, you should know that you can. They will treat it confidentially, without judgement. This means they will not tell your parents (if this is your preference) unless you are doing something that can put yourself or others at risk.

**They can then talk with you about health concerns that are unique and appropriate to you.**



# Two's company – and that's your choice

**It's important that you feel you can talk about all aspects of your health with your diabetes team.**

You have a choice about who goes into your consultations (appointments) with you. You can choose to go alone, but some young people find it useful to have their partner with them so that they can have a better understanding of diabetes care.

”

Find someone who is willing to learn about and accept your diabetes. Educate your partner. Establish balance/ground rules you expect from each other, like letting them know what they can do to help (if you want them to) and when you need to be independent.

**Alys, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**

”

A big step in my relationship was letting my partner attend my clinic appointments with me. It's actually made our relationship stronger and I'm able to take care of myself better because I let people in now, I'm more honest and I take responsibility. It's still hard, but I feel so much better.

**Rhiannon, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**

**While everyone should take precautions to practice safer sex, there are extra things that people living with Type 1 diabetes will need to think about.**

## Contraception

**It is each person's responsibility to ensure they have safer sex.**

Contraception methods protect you against unwanted pregnancy. But using a condom as well as other contraception can protect you and your partner from STIs or STDs.

All contraception options are available to people with Type 1 diabetes, but you should talk through the options with a healthcare professional, so they can help you choose the most suitable type for you. It is important to be honest with them as other lifestyle choices such as smoking can affect which types of contraception are suitable.

Women who live with Type 1 diabetes have as much chance of getting pregnant as other women.

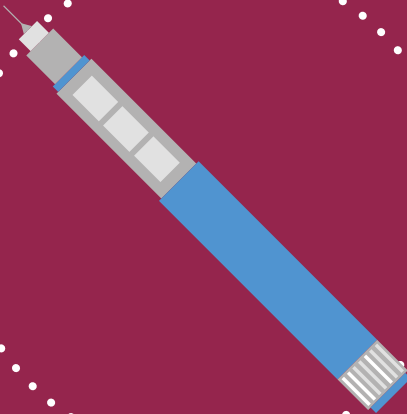
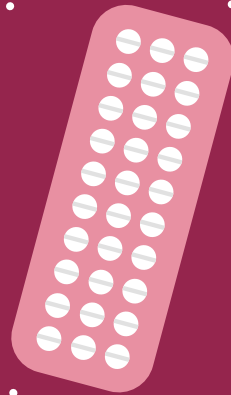
See **page 16** for more information on pregnancy and Type 1 diabetes.



# Contraception and blood glucose levels

**It is important to inform your diabetes team of any new medications so that they can help you make any necessary adjustments.**

Most contraception options will not affect your blood glucose levels, but some medications that contain oestrogen may make you less sensitive to insulin and make your blood glucose levels higher.



# Telling a partner – it's good to talk

**Who you decide to tell about your diabetes and when you tell them is up to you. Some choose not to say on a first date, others say as soon as they need to check their blood glucose levels or take their insulin.**

With or without a diagnosis of a health condition, openness and honesty can be qualities that people find attractive and look for in a relationship. Talking about lots of different parts of your life with your partner or potential partner can help with developing good communication, so talking about your diabetes may strengthen your relationship too!

”

Never let anyone hold your diabetes against you. Don't settle for someone if they are not going to be empathetic or supportive.

**Alys, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**

”

Finding a partner willing to learn and understand my diabetes, who can notice my hypos and highs and wants the best for me has really helped with my confidence in managing my condition, for both HbA1c levels and my overall emotional wellbeing.

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Never be shy about checking your bloods, taking insulin or treating a hypo in front of a partner. There shouldn't be a need to hide your condition once you have built up that initial relationship.

**Zaheer, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**



# Hypos – the low down

**Physical activity can affect your blood glucose levels and sex is no different. You use lots of energy during sex, even if you don't feel like you are, so your blood glucose levels may be affected.**

## **Keep hypo treatment nearby.**

In the heat of the moment you may miss your hypo warning signs, so it is a good idea to tell your partner about your diabetes so that you're less likely to be interrupted and surprised by unexpected or unwanted hurdles. If you feel hypo, then it's important that you feel able to stop and have some glucose. Avoid the temptation to ignore your warning signs or you could end up making the situation worse.

Equally it is important to remember hormones released into your bloodstream during sex may create a spike in your blood glucose too, so take time to get to know your own body so you can notice what tends to happen to you.

”

Sex counts as exercise so treat it as such. Hypos happen! We've learned to have to laugh about it now.

**Alys, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**



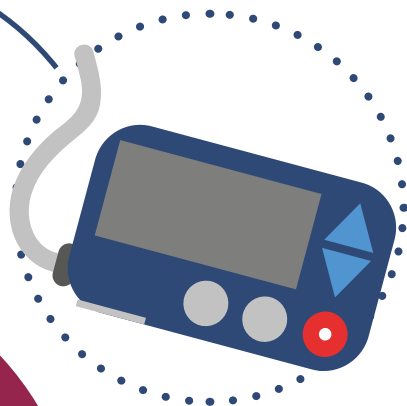
# Insulin pumps – a fine line

**Wearing an insulin pump, or any other diabetes technology, doesn't mean that it needs to interfere with intimacy.**

Whether you decide to disconnect your pump during sex or not will depend on your personal preference with what feels most comfortable for you.

If you choose to remove it, follow the guidance you've been given by your diabetes team when disconnecting.

**Remember to reconnect it afterwards or you risk developing high blood glucose levels and/or diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA).**



”

It's never even occurred to me to remove my pump during sex, it's a part of me and I think we both understand how vital it is, so it's here to stay. For me, it's never been a problem. But I've had my fair share of hypos - keep a stash of hypo treatments near the bed!

**Rhiannon, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**

# Thrush – a common problem

**Thrush is a common problem that occurs whether you live with Type 1 diabetes or not. It causes itching and soreness.**

Thrush can develop in anyone and can be passed onto partners. It can be very uncomfortable and can cause pain during sexual intercourse.

It is also possible to develop oral thrush; this is often visible as white coloured patches on the tongue and in the mouth.

Smoking will increase your chance of developing oral thrush too.

People living with Type 1 diabetes are at a higher risk of developing thrush because higher blood glucose levels create an ideal environment for the yeast to grow.

- Keeping blood glucose within range as often as possible will reduce the chances of developing thrush
- Treatment for thrush is available over the counter without prescription, but it's better to get an accurate diagnosis from your GP who will be able to offer you further support, advice or treatment
- If you find that you are having thrush frequently you should discuss this with your diabetes team as they will be able to help you make adjustments to manage your diabetes

# Sexual function – enjoying sex

**There are many factors which can affect the enjoyment of sex whether you have Type 1 diabetes or not.**

For both men and women, Type 1 diabetes can sometimes cause physical problems before or during sex as it can affect your nerve endings. These nerve endings are all around your body and play an important part in your ability to have sex comfortably.



## **What this means if you are female:**

You could sometimes feel pain or discomfort when having sex. You may lose interest or find it difficult to reach intense sexual pleasure, also known as achieving orgasm.

## **What this means if you are male:**

You could sometimes find it difficult to get/keep an erection during intercourse.

**If you have any concerns, then it is important to discuss it with your diabetes team. They are there to help you, not judge you.**

**These issues may not seem relevant to you right now but knowing how Type 1 diabetes can affect your body may be useful in the future.**

# Hormones – swings and roundabouts

**Hormonal changes in the body can happen for many reasons at different stages of life and can often affect blood glucose levels. This is because some hormones can make you less sensitive to insulin.**

**Some of these stages include:**

- Puberty
- Stress/adrenaline
- Illness
- Pregnancy
- Menstrual cycle/periods
- Menopause

If you notice that regular hormone changes are affecting your blood glucose levels, talk to your diabetes team about how you can adjust your insulin accordingly.



”

I wish I'd realised sooner the impact my period could have on my blood glucose levels! Mine tend to run higher and I'm kinder to myself during these few days now. I try to keep a note of how my blood glucose levels change so I can identify patterns to help combat it the next time round, but it's still not an exact science and I'm always learning.

**Becky, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**

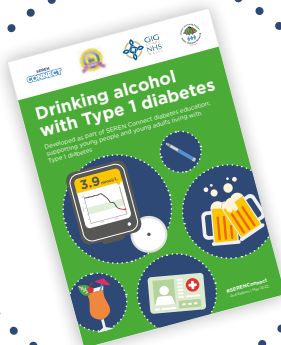
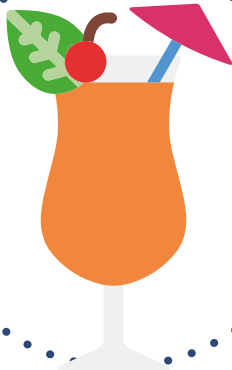
# Sex on the beach (and other drinks containing alcohol!)

If you're engaging in sexual activity when you've been drinking alcohol, it's important to remember that alcohol can play a part in both increasing and decreasing your blood glucose levels, depending on the type of drink, and quantity of alcohol.

Drinking alcohol may also cloud your judgement, so keep an eye on your blood glucose levels and keep a hypo treatment nearby as the alcohol mixed with using energy can increase your risk of hypo.

Please see **SEREN Connect: Drinking alcohol with Type 1 diabetes** for more information.

If you've not been given one of these booklets or have any further questions, speak with your diabetes team.



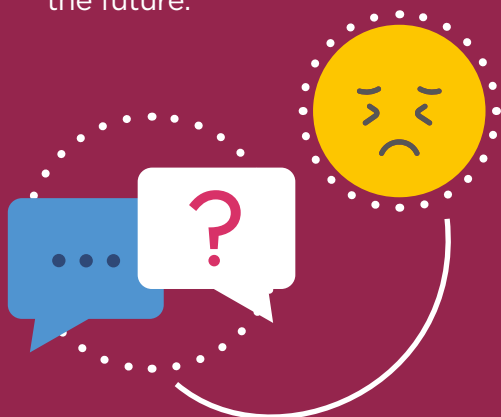
# Not in the mood?

**If you notice a change in your sex drive as you get older, and this is something that concerns you, you might benefit from talking about this with a member of your diabetes team who you feel comfortable with.**

Sometimes depression and other mental health issues can affect a person's desire to engage in sexual activity.

People living with Type 1 diabetes are twice as likely to experience depression at some point in their lives than those who don't live with Type 1 diabetes.

This doesn't mean that you will, but it is important that you are aware of this and are able to seek support if this is something you experience at any point in the future.



## Type 1 diabetes and mental health

If ever you feel like your health is getting you down, making you feel sad, anxious or overwhelmed then make sure you talk about this with someone you trust. This can be a friend, family member, teacher, your GP or a member of your diabetes team.

You may be offered the opportunity to connect with others in a position to help you with some advice, or understanding. Or if more appropriate there are trained professionals who can help you devise strategies to work with your thoughts and feelings.

**Don't feel like you have to struggle on your own, there are people who can help.**

# Pregnancy – plan ahead

**Women who live with Type 1 diabetes have as much chance of getting pregnant as other women, but there can be risks to the baby's development and the health of the mother during pregnancy.**

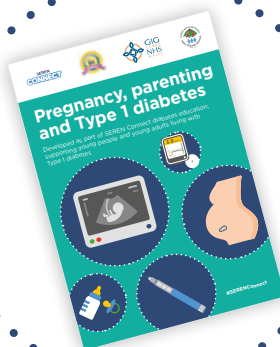
**The best way to reduce any risks is careful planning.**

Whether you live with Type 1 diabetes or not, it is ideal to plan the pregnancy in advance. If you feel ready to start planning a pregnancy at any point in the future, then talk to your diabetes team who can help you prepare and work with you to ensure your Type 1 diabetes is managed appropriately.



Please see **SEREN Connect: Pregnancy, parenting and Type 1 diabetes** for more information.

If you've not been given one of these booklets or have any further questions, speak with your diabetes team.





# You've just found out you're pregnant. What should you do?

## Sometimes life doesn't go to plan.

Contact your diabetes team as soon as possible. The early stages of pregnancy are an important time in the development of the baby. So the sooner you get your blood glucose into target, the better. Your team can help you to lower your HbA1c and get the best results for you and the baby.

Blood glucose targets during pregnancy are tighter than

usual, so your team may suggest different diabetes treatments or technology.

Talking any of your concerns through with your diabetes team can help you understand the options available to you and help you make the right decisions for your own health – if ever you don't understand, don't be afraid to ask questions.

## Cervical screening

All women aged 25 to 64 are invited for cervical screening every three years. This simple procedure can detect unhealthy cells which if left untreated can turn into cancer. You should expect your first invitation a few months before your 25th birthday, so ensure you know how to book your appointment and ask your GP if you'd like further information about this.

If you want more information on sexual health you can visit the NHS Direct Website:  
**[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/  
LiveWell/LifestyleWellbeing/  
Sexualhealth](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LiveWell/LifestyleWellbeing/Sexualhealth)**

For more information, help and advice on LGBT+ issues please visit:  
**[www.stonewallcymru.org.uk](http://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk)**





If you want further information on your local sexual health services, you can search on the NHS Direct Wales website by choosing 'sexual health' as your topic choice and inputting your post code. This will pull up the local services available to you.

**[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/  
LocalServices](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices)**

# Notes





# Other SEREN Connect Resources







### Drinking alcohol with Type 1 diabetes

Developed as part of SEREN Connect diabetes education, supporting young people and young adults living with Type 1 diabetes







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### Learning to drive and driving safely with Type 1 diabetes

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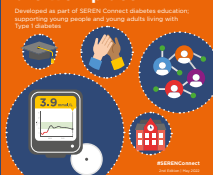



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### Managing Type 1 diabetes: post-school, at university and in the workplace

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### Pregnancy, parenting and Type 1 diabetes

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### Travel, events and festivals with Type 1 diabetes

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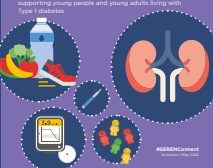



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### Understanding Type 1 diabetes, kidney health and nephropathy

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### Understanding Type 1 diabetes, your eye health and retinopathy

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### Understanding Type 1 diabetes, your feet and neuropathy

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