



Diabetes in Sport & Exercise: Executive Summary

Diabetes [affects 5.8 million people](#) (1) in the United Kingdom. Of those living with the condition, approximately 8% have Type 1 diabetes (T1D) and 90% have Type 2 diabetes (T2D). An [estimated 3.9 million people](#) (2) living with diabetes require medication to manage their condition. This is important, as the Equality Act 2010 protects these individuals from discrimination because they are living with a long-term health condition that constitutes a disability under this legislation. As such, individuals living with diabetes are legally protected and must be afforded equal opportunities to participate, progress, and thrive within sport regardless of which mainstream or disability sport setting it is.

Type 1 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes among children in the UK, with around 44,000 children currently diagnosed. [Evidence shows that children with T1D are less active](#) (3) than their mainstream peers. With very limited provision across the sport and physical activity sector, this disparity is unlikely to change without targeted action.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes in adults in the UK. Evidence shows that these individuals are only half as physically active as their peers (4). As with T1D, the community often experiences stigma and stereotyping linked to diabetes, and obesity, which is a condition affecting 70% of people with T2D. There is also a lack of education and awareness surrounding T2D among coaches and physical activity organisations, whilst those on specific oral medications or insulin can also face challenges managing their glucose levels around exercise.

[National research conducted by Breakthrough T1D](#) (5), alongside studies led by the University of Exeter and University of Worcester, highlight that misunderstandings and misconceptions about T1D frequently lead to exclusion from sports. This can create environments characterised by fear, embarrassment, and a reluctance to participate. While the majority of study participants recognised the importance of physical activity, many still encountered or saw substantial barriers, including:

- A lack of education and awareness about T1D among coaches and sport organisations (6)
- Stigma and stereotyping associated with diabetes (7)
- Challenges associated to managing blood glucose levels during physical activity (8)
- Few institutional or governing body led policies for Diabetes (9)
- The cognitive, practical and emotional demands involved in managing physical activity with T1D (10)

To address these issues, we are seeking the support of the Sport and Activity sector who hold both a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that sport is inclusive and accessible to all. Together, we can create environments where people living with diabetes feel valued, supported, and able to

Member of Parliament for Redditch and the Villages

fully participate in sport and physical activity.

For many individuals living with diabetes, active management of their condition is a central part of daily life. Engaging in exercise, physical activity, and sport can play a crucial role in supporting effective diabetes management, as well as improving physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

National policy is increasingly positioning physical activity as a cornerstone of both preventing and managing long-term conditions. The NHS 10-year plan "Fit for the Future" highlights the need to embed physical activity within routine healthcare pathways, and public health initiatives are promoting activity across the wider population. Yet, in the absence of tailored, condition-specific support, people with diabetes risk being left behind and unable to fully engage in physical activity. The accompanying principles have been developed to support those responsible for sport and physical activity across the UK to make informed adjustments and provide more inclusive, empowering experiences for people living with diabetes.

Our objective is to ensure that people with diabetes are able to access physical activity and sport. This could be through dedicated or integrated provision within sport and physical activity settings, but this choice should lie with people with diabetes. Our aim is to ensure those living with diabetes can take part in all sports, free from discrimination, stigma and inequity. Driving participation amongst this group is vital to reducing the inequality gap that Sport England Active Lives Measurement has identified, whilst also generating social value by getting more disabled people active [as reported by Activity Alliance](#) (11).

To do this, we want to work collaboratively with the sector in conjunction with the group of organisations listed within this document. We recognise that by working together we can implement the most effective practices to tackle the barriers people with diabetes are facing.

Call to Action: DCMS and Sport England

We urge sector leaders to take the following actions:

- Urgently develop national guidance for schools, coaches, and sports providers on supporting children and adults living with diabetes in sport and activity settings, ensuring high quality experiences.
- Expand access to inclusive sport programmes for people with, or at risk of, diabetes.
- Improve training and education for teachers, coaches, and community sports leaders to manage diabetes safely and confidently during sport and activity sessions.
- Increase investment in inclusion strategies and research throughout sport and activity, particularly within underserved communities and those facing the greatest health inequalities.

Call to Action for the Sport Sector Organisations

This call applies to all organisations involved in delivering sport and physical activity, including but not limited to: National Governing Bodies, Leisure Providers, Active Partnerships, National Partners and School settings. We ask you to urgently review:

- Current Policies and Procedures - to reflect the needs of people living with diabetes and provide guidance to comply, protect and support them.
- Education Frameworks - ensuring that fundamental diabetes management and support is covered.
- Workforce Development, People Plans, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plans - to reflect and identify training needs to ensure a confident and competent workforce that can support more people living with diabetes to enjoy sport and activity.
- Adopting clear, evidence-based guidelines for supporting people with diabetes is essential to meeting their needs, promoting best practice, and creating an environment where every individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Key Organisations supporting this change:

[Breakthrough T1D](#) - As the leading global charity for type 1 diabetes, Breakthrough T1D are improving lives today and working toward a future without T1D. By uniting brilliant minds, funding ground breaking research, advocating for better access, and supporting the T1D community, the charity is opening doors that were once closed by this diagnosis.

[Diabetes UK](#) - is a leading charity for people living with diabetes in the UK. They campaign for better care, give support in times of need and fund ground-breaking research into new treatments and a cure. Diabetes UK offers exercise advice, support, and free resources to help people get active. They also create guides for exercise and deliver training on physical activity.

[EXTOD](#) (Exercise for Type One Diabetes) - a collaborative network of healthcare professionals, researchers, and people living with Type 1 diabetes. EXTOD provides education to healthcare professionals and people with diabetes, based on the latest research, which enables those with T1D to participate in sport and exercise safely, enjoyably and confidently. EXTOD also has experience in providing highly expert advice and support to organisations in the development of guidance, policies and procedures for the inclusion of people with T1D in sport and exercise. EXTOD has also developed and delivered supporting education/training for coaches and sporting organisations.

[Activity Alliance](#) - a national charity and leading voice for disabled people in sports and activities. Activity Alliance can help provide you with a wealth of advice, training and resources to embed inclusive practice.

[We Are Undefeatable](#) - is a national campaign by the Richmond Group of Charities to support the 15 million people who live with one or more long term health conditions in England. Diabetes UK is a partner, which supports the campaign with its information and guidance to support people being active with diabetes.

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